NOW AND THEN

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services/Institute for Appalachian Affairs

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Nathan Livingston, pastor of Rocky Point Baptist Church near Morristown, Tennessee, his wife Debbie and their children, Daniel, and twins Rebekah and Rachel, in Johnson City, 1984. (Photo by Alice Anthony)

Homecoming '86

Featuring Lisa Alther - Jo Carson - Fred Chappell - Don Johnson - Ed McClanahan - Jim Wayne Miller - John Yount

Frank Williams. See Page 18.

Lisa Alther. See page 7.

Margaret Gregg. See page 26.

John Yount. See page 10.

From the Director

Richard Blaustein

This special issue of *Now and Then* deals with the theme of homecoming on several levels. All across the state of Tennessee, large and small communities are celebrating Tennessee Homecoming '86, a commemoration of the history and traditions of the Volunteer State. Earlier this year, it was our privilege and good fortune to have Alex Haley, world-renowned author of *Roots* and co-chairman of the state's Homecoming committee as a featured lecturer during ETSU's celebration of its own 75th anniversary. During this last year, we at CASS have been working with a variety of local Tennessee Homecoming '86 projects, including the innovative community wall hangings developed by textile artist and CASS Fellow Margaret Gregg, who was interviewed for this issue by Pat Arnow. Another interview by Pat Arnow with Dr. Frank Williams, professor emeritus of history at East Tennessee State University, brings to the surface a number of humorous anecdotes and personal sidelights which were not included in his soon-to-be published history of the university. Another CASS Fellow, Anndrena Belcher, who was born in Eastern Kentucky and raised in an Appalachian migrant neighborhood in Chicago, shares with us her feelings concerning the Appalachian exodus and return, taken from the script of *Long Journey Home*, an Appalshop film-in-progress dealing with the problems of Appalachian migrants. Our literary section in this special Appalachian Homecoming issue of *Now and Then* features the work and comments of several distinguished writers with southern mountain roots who took part in a regional writers' symposium last fall organized by Dr. Don Johnson, chairman of the ETSU English department, with funding provided by CASS and the literature division of the National Endowment for the Arts. Their work is garnished by contributions from members of the Appalachian Writers Association, producing a remarkable bouquet of poetry, prose and reminiscences. We hope you enjoy it.

Once again, we have come a long way in a short time but we still have a long way to go. We appreciate the many kind comments we received from readers of *Now and Then*, but we do need financial as well as moral support. If you haven't already subscribed to *Now and Then*, we hope that you will. Individual subscriptions are $7.50 a year for three issues; $10.00 for schools and libraries. Larger contributions will help us continue the work of CASS. Make checks payable to CASS/ ETSU Foundation c/o CASS, Box 19180A, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-0002. Stay with us.

Fred Chappell. See page 6.

From the Editor

Fred Waage

Now and Then celebrates Homecoming '86 with a rich diversity of writing and photography. We feature work by seven of the distinguished Appalachian writers of our time, who returned to their home area to discuss writing with East Tennessee students in the fall of 1985. Other featured presences in this issue are historian Frank Williams, discussing the heritage of East Tennessee State University; Margaret Gregg and photographs of her Homecoming '86 tapestries produced under a fellowship from the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services; and actress/storyteller Anndrena Belcher, commenting on the film *Long Journey Home*, whose script is (partially) premiering here in print.

Our aim is to express the collective spirit of Homecoming '86 through individual experiences of separation and return. Thus our issue also contains an outstanding anthology of poetry, fiction and personal memoirs which explore these experiences. *Now and Then* wishes to thank warmly Garry Barker and the members of the Appalachian Writers' Association, who made this anthology possible through their generous contributions of material. We only regret that we could not print everything, but wish to remind all writers and readers of the themes of upcoming issues (Fall, 1986: Cherokees; Winter, 1987: Appalachian Childhoods; Spring, 1987: The World of the Appalachian Writer), and encourage the submission of words and/or pictures for those issues.

This is my final issue as editor of *Now and Then*, although I will continue to be associated with the magazine. I am grateful to have been able to work with Richard Blaustein, Pat Arnow, the ETSU Press and all the other friends of and contributors to this periodical. I believe in these two years *Now and Then* has established a strong identity as an indispensible Appalachian publication, and am confident it will continue to merit your support and participation.

From the Archives

Ellen Garrison

Novels from George Orwell's *1984* to Alex Haley's *Roots* have explored the relationship between a people's knowledge of their past and their sense of self-respect and hope in the present. Tennessee Homecoming '86, a state-wide celebration inaugurated by Governor Lamar Alexander, is designed to give Tennesseans just such an awareness of their heritage and hope for the future of their state. East Tennessee State University's 75th anniversary coincides with Homecoming '86, and the university has been designated an official Homecoming '86 community, making its anniversary events part of this statewide celebration.

The theme of the university's celebration, "75 Years of Tradition and Vision," symbolizes the link between knowledge of the past and strength for the future, for without tradition there is no vision. Documentary resources — photographs, letters, minutes, audio and video tapes — represent the best means of getting in touch with the university's traditions, and the university archives and its staff have been involved in a variety of activities celebrating the anniversary.

Drawing on presidential papers housed in the archives, staff members have written brief biographies of each president for the program of each Presidential Distinguished Lecture. The College of Arts and Sciences used photographs from the archives for an anniversary calendar, as did university photographer Larry Smith, who created photo-cube exhibits. Archives staff will also help select and preserve material for a time capsule and plan a re-enactment of the dedication ceremony, both part of the birthday celebration to be held in October, 1986.

Making students more aware of the university's traditions has been a special focus during the anniversary year. The archives and department of English are co-sponsoring a student writing competition in which students will write papers focusing on some aspect of the university's history for freshman English. A selection of these essays will be published in the fall of 1986 and cash awards given for the best entries. Along with museum director Helen Roseberry, the archives staff developed questions for a scavenger hunt, sponsored by the Residence Hall Association, designed to acquaint students not only with important events and individuals in the university's past but also with current offices and officials, including President Ronald E. Beller.

The archives is presenting a series of exhibits in the Sherrod Library revolving around university themes: anniversaries and other celebrations in ETSU's history, on 75 years of sports at the university, professors yesterday and today, graduation through the years, the changing campus, and 75 years of student life.

The university's heritage project for Homecoming '86 is the establishment of a collection relating to the 75th anniversary. The archives will receive copies of each printed brochure, program and flyer along with records generated by the 75th anniversary steering committee (on which the archives' director serves) and its subcommittees, while the Reece Museum will receive memorabilia produced to commemorate the anniversary year.

In 2011 the university will celebrate its centennial, and this collection of 75th anniversary records will be a valuable tool in planning that celebration. More important, by preserving the university's documentary heritage, the university archives provides a tangible link between the past and present, a link which is the cornerstone of the university's vision.

Pat Arrowood

Alex Haley at ETSU, speaking of growing up in Tennessee.

From the Reece Museum

Helen Roseberry

Although the Carroll Reece Museum was established in 1965, its roots predate that time by thirty-four years. Not everyone is aware that Dr. C.C. Sherrod, our parent institution's second president, designated as a museum the third floor of the "new fireproof library," which was dedicated on August 10, 1931.

This illustrates the understanding one gains from investigating one's roots. As Alex Haley said, "We need to do more looking back." That's what '86 at East Tennessee State University is all about...that and our vision for the future!

As Haley recollected, "I remember sitting on my front porch in Henning when I was a very little boy, listening to my grandmother tell me stories about my ancestors...wonderful stories that eventually became *Roots*.

"We need more front porch storytelling...because every time an old person dies, it's like a library burned down. We need to do more looking back. That's why Homecoming '86 is so important to me."

Our involvement in Tennessee Homecoming '86 is twofold. Appropriately, East Tennessee Sate University's 75th Anniversary celebration is our Tennessee Homecoming '86 community heritage project. As our state is immersed in researching its roots, the university and the Carroll Reece Museum celebrate anniversaries highlighting both tradition and vision.

The Carroll Reece Museum has assembled a collection of university memorabilia and historic items. Assembling these collections has caused us to reflect upon our heritage. Through illuminating our beginnings, we develop a clearer vision of excellence.

The Reece Museum presents a year of programming by, for and about Tennesseans — featuring traveling exhibitions provided by the Tennessee Watercolor Society, Third National Corporation, the Dulin Art Gallery in Knoxville, and First Tennessee Bank. Additionally, exhibits will feature regional artists and ETSU alumni. Our participation in Tennessee Homecoming '86 reflects not only Tennessee but ETSU's 75th anniversary and the Reece's 35th year.

Writers' Homecoming

Pat Arnow

In the fall of 1985, seven writers visted ETSU: Lisa Alther, Jo Carson, Fred Chappell, Don Johnson, Ed McClanahan, Jim Wayne Miller and John Yount. Each gave a public reading, presided over a question and answer session and met with Fred Waage's creative writing class.

There was some diversity among them, also a few things in common. They ranged in age from their late 30's to their 50's. Most were university teachers, most smoked cigarettes. They generally dressed rather casually, spoke candidly, and warmly shared their love of the craft.

They also shared a mountain or southern tradition. Two, Alther and Carson, were born and raised here in East Tennessee. Chappell and Miller grew up in Western North Carolina. McClanahan hailed from Kentucky, Johnson from West Virginia. Only Yount did not claim any special territory: he said he grew up in many places, but he was born in Boone, North Carolina and has written about Eastern Kentucky; he was at home here.

Some have moved on: Alther to Vermont, Yount to New Hampshire. Miller teaches in Western Kentucky. The others live not too far from where they were born. Each speaks with a distinctive voice. It flavors the writing, this rhythm from home.

The profiles here come from their public presentations at ETSU and from personal interviews. The authors have also generously allowed us to print some of their work.

Ed McClanahan

"Really good writing has to run the risk of being sentimental..."

Ed McClanahan could easily talk about homecoming. His life and his novels echo with the theme of leaving and returning. "My life began in Kentucky and landed on the West Coast throughout the 60's, and then in the 70's I gradually worked my way back to Kentucky." His latest book, *Famous People I Have Known*, "is an account of that as a kind of spiritual odyssey, a comic spiritual odyssey, I should say."

© True Light Photography

Ed McClanahan.

In this "non-fiction comic autobiography with fictional qualities" are characters such as Ken Kesey, who is "almost realer than you can imagine," and a friend from Lexington, Kentucky, Little Enis, the All-American left-handed upside down guitar player. "He's a featured figure in the book, which gives you some idea of what I mean by famous people."

The writing of *The Natural Man*, McClanahan's first book, published in 1983, was also something of a spiritual odyssey for the author. This comic novel set in a small town in Kentucky took the writer more than 20 years to complete. He started the book when he was teaching in Oregon and then at Stanford, but "I got caught up in *la vie* California. It was great while it lasted, or while I lasted. It was perfectly splendid for about 10 years.

"The book was changing during all those years and so was I. The book originally was a kind of rejection of small towns and their limitations and small town ways and country people and that in favor of some — sophistication and enlightenment and all those charming things that go with it. The longer I lived in California the more dissatisfied with that vision I became, although I wasn't quite sure why that was.

"In its original form, the book was about how these insensitive louts in my home town had failed to understand my sensitivity and empathize with it. In the final version the book is almost exactly the opposite of that. It wasn't really until I came back to Kentucky and really reconciled myself to being here that I was able to make the book come to life. It started off to be a book about rejection and alienation and ended up being a book about friendship and reconciliation.

"To my way of thinking the most important line in that novel is the line that says of Harry, 'He was a son of Needmore now and that would never change.' I would never have been able to write that line when I lived in California — for obvious reasons — I didn't think I was one.

"I think I couldn't have written it without knowing what I learned when I came back to Kentucky. It was a suspicion, but it took coming back to prove it to myself. I couldn't have written that line because I would have been embarrassed by it. It would have sounded sentimental. As a matter of fact, I think that really good writing has to run the risk of being sentimental. And I never felt ready to take that chance until I came back here. But it was worth the chance.

McClanahan now lives with his wife and two children in Port Royal, Kentucky. "I live about 100 miles from my home town in a neighborhood that's practically the mirror image of my home town. I still have lots of friends out West, but I think they all think that it's ridiculous to want to live back here. I'm sitting here right now looking at this beautiful pasture out behind my house in which my wife's horse is wandering around, and anybody who couldn't understand why I like it has got a problem."

Where I Live

Ed McClanahan

This essay was written on assignment for Esquire magazine, for its series entitled "Why I Live Where I Live." Esquire rejected the piece, on the grounds that it was "not upscale literary New York enough for this magazine." Precisely. —E.M.

Where I live now — and where I hope to live as long as I live anywhere — is in a comfortable old white frame farmhouse on a two-lane road a mile or so outside a little Kentucky River town called Port Royal, in what I like to call South-central Northeastern Kentucky, not far (not far enough) from Louisville.

I grew up in South-central Northeastern Kentucky, only about eighty miles east of Port Royal, but I took the long way around to get from there to here. I came by way of Oregon, California, and Montana, my principal stops during a twenty-year ramble through the west, riding the Visiting Lecturer in Creational Writage circuit, following my nose, my muse, ...and, sometimes, my muse's nose.

In fact, I was back on the road again when I landed in Port Royal, almost ten years ago, and came to a screeching halt. I had recently worn out my welcome as Visiting Lecturer at yet another western university, and my wife, Cia, and I had then embarked upon what was surely one of the most feckless endeavors in the history of freelance literary enterprise: We were banging about the country in an old VW Microbus, trying to put together a book about honkytonks — which, we'd been discovering, is something like trying to write about mortuaries when you're full of embalming fluid. By the time we got to Kentucky, we'd had about all the beer, bad country music, and barstool philosophy we could handle. We were coming down with a serious case of the honkytonk blues, compounded by a touch of motion sickness.

Our plan had been to visit my old friends Wendell and Tanya Berry at their farm near Port Royal — Wendell being, of course, the noted Kentucky poet, novelist, essayist, and ecology curmudgeon, who has been a denizen of these parts almost all his life — and to put up for a few weeks of R&R in the vacant tenant house on Wendell's uncle Jim Perry's farm, just down the road. The little house had seen better days, but after all those weeks in that VW it seemed to us extravagantly well appointed, and as roomy as all outdoors. And the location was just grand — a pretty river at our doorstep, a garden on the riverbank, a Cinemascope view of the valley without another house in sight. It was the perfect spot for a pair of road-weary nesters to set up housekeeping, and we knew right away that it was going to figure in our future, if we could just manage to survive the present.

Survive we did, although in the process Wendell's estimable Uncle Jim learned, the hard way, never to let a Visiting Lecturer get a foot in the door; we lived, rent-free, in his tenant house — still my all-time favorite residence — for the next five years, until our burgeoning family obliged us to seek larger accommodations. My career in creational writage hadn't proved to be quite as moribund as I'd once thought it was, and with a little help from our friends we bought the house we live in now, out on the other side of town. The McSquatleys were digging in for the long pull.

As urban complexes go, Port Royal doesn't amount to much — a clutch of forty or fifty neat, modest houses on the bluff above the river, a couple of stoutly Protestant churches, a grocery store, a branch of the county bank, a post office, Miss Mary Gladys's junktique store, a garage, and the H&H Coal Company and Drug Store, which has sold neither coal nor drugs for a very long time, but does turn a lot of trade in an astonishing variety of feed and seed, soda pop, hardware, rototillers, farm supplies, building supplies, work clothes, housewares, chain saws, candy bars, lawnmowers, wristwatches, gas and oil, instant coffee, microwave mystery-burgers, and conversation. The H&H — or, as it's known far and wide in Henry County, "William Van's," after its proprietor, William Van Hawkins — is Port Royal's answer to the Louisville shopping malls that have sapped the economic vitality of this and a hundred other small towns around here; if William Van ain't got it, you don't need it, and chances are you're better off without it.

Port Royal is unincorporated, so it is graced by no city hall, no mayor, not even a constable. But keeping the peace (except at Halloween, which seems to last in this neighborhood from Columbus Day till around Thanksgiving, and is apparently celebrated by every sporting young buck under the age of about 37) generally presents no problem, not since Henry County voted itself dry back in the '30's, and Coondick Garrett closed his poolroom.

We still have our fair share of reprobates, you understand: For instance, there's the local gent we'll call Pisswilliger, who, in his youth, spent a few seasons as the star attraction of a carnival sideshow, and nowadays occasionally entertains the clientele in William Van's by munching light bulbs and razor blades — mere appetizers, Pisswilliger hints, for the live chickens and varmints *tartare* he'd dined on when he was big in show business.

And how about old Freck, the village inebriate who wandered into the Baptist church one Sunday morning while the preacher, a young seminarian, was expounding on the text "Can these bones live?" from Ezekiel 37:3. Freck made his way unsteadily down the aisle and installed himself in the front pew, where, evidently contemplating the ravages to the soul of a life misspent, he set up an increasingly audible moaning and groaning whenever the preacher drove home a point. As the seminarian warmed to his theme, he made of his text a sort of refrain, sonorously intoning, as a tag-line to each paragraph of the sermon, "Can these . . . bones . . . live?" Each time he posed the question, Freck would answer with a lugubrious groan. "So once again," the preacher declared at last, "once again we must ask ourselves the Bibical question, 'Can these . . . bones . . . live?'" "No way!" cried Freck, in a voice thick with remorse and Mogen David. "No way!"

Then there's the widow lady down the road a piece, the one whose woodpile is said to grow miraculously larger each year as the winter progresses . . .

But in the main, the two hundred or so citizens of Port Royal and its immediate environs are surely the swellest, sweetest, most upright, most generous, least suspicious two hundred folks assembled anywhere this side of Heaven's gate — as evidenced by the fact that when a certain disreputable-looking old drop-out and his child-bride (actually she was 27, but next to me she looked a whole lot younger) pulled into town, travel-bedraggled and as poor as Job's turkey, everybody was...*nice* to us! They helped us plumb and carpenter and get the resident water-snake out of the cistern and winterize the house and cut firewood, they gave us credit at the garage and the grocery store and William Van's, they invited us to supper, to church, to hog-killings and homemakers' meetings and poker parties, in

the spring they helped us get a garden in the ground, they brought us fruit and vegetables and eggs and milk and fresh-caught catfish and even, now and then, a squirrel or two. When our babies came along, our neighbors helped us welcome them, and a few years later, when Cia miscarried and we lost our twins, they helped us grieve.

Country people are more trusting — therefore more generous, and kinder — than megalopolitans, suburbanites, and other backward races because, if you'll pardon the tautology, they're more secure. Here in Port Royal, we're always among friends. One tries to pull one's weight, of course; for a while there I cut tobacco and bucked hay and forked manure and castrated calves like a very son of the soil. But in the ledger where such accounts are kept, we'll never get our books to balance, because our friends just keep right on being good to us.

Not that folks hereabouts don't set great store by their independence. Consider, for instance, my excellent friend and nearest neighbor Kelsie Mertz, a farmer, trapper, beekeeper, occasional fiddler, and pretty fair Sunday painter, who takes his independence very seriously: Ask Kelsie to sell you one of his pictures, and he's liable to tell you to go paint your own, if you like it so damn much. "Some people," says Kelsie indignantly, "think that if you've got something nice, they ought to have it!" Just so.

The operative social principle, though, is interdependence. Around here, everybody (my incompetent self excluded) can carpenter a little, or plumb, or wire, or weld; and since we don't have ready access to the service industries, we all rely on our resident geniuses, such as my friend Sherman, the Oral Roberts of backyard auto mechanics, who can fix what ails your car by the merest laying on of hands, or Red Meder, who's not only an *artiste* with a welding torch but is also a dead ringer for both Phil Harris *and* Forrest Tucker, and a wonderfully entertaining cusser besides. We even have our own local whole-systems analyst — the jack-leg plumber Wendell told me about, who, after examining a neighbor's queasy septic tank, solemnly opined that the tank's indigestion had arisen from the owner's failure to chew his food properly.

This part of the country has its problems, certainly. For openers, the imminent collapse of the federally administered tobacco price-support program (when Howard Metzenbaum's your enemy and Jesse Helms is your best friend, you got troubles, son) threatens to turn a lot of lovely and productive farmland back into a tangled wilderness. In the northwest corner of the county, there's a toxic waste "recycling" facility that sometimes seems to bubble as ominously as a witch's cauldron; and since we have no zoning laws, other similarly amiable industries are doubtless eyeing us and licking their chops. We have too many poor people and, probably, too many rich ones too. Our schools, like everybody else's, are understaffed and over-administrated. And Louisville's pernicious suburbs are creeping inexorably in our direction; not ten minutes ago I heard a radio report of a traffic accident "on the corner of Radiance Road and Rainbow Drive, out in the Heidi Springs subdivision . . . "

Ah, but the compensations! Our TV reception's not too good, and we almost never have to go to the movies. John Y. Brown Jr. and Phyllis George have moved to New York, and that's been a great comfort. There are no sushi bars in Port Royal, no Volvos, no Hairless Krishnas, and hardly any joggers. We have more cows than people — a social order in perfect balance. The world our children grow up in will be circumscribed, but they'll know it inch by inch: their society will be small, but it will last them all their lives. As long as they behave themselves, they'll never run out of friends. Cia and I haven't honkytonked in years. My personal romance with country music ended the night I dropped in for a beer at the Pit Stop Bar & Bait Shop (formerly the M&M Disco & Bait Shop) down in Carrollton, across the county line, and heard a song on the jukebox. I went home and wrote my own song, about a couple of drifters who find each other, fall in love, and come to rest in Kentucky I'll spare you the rest of the lyrics, but the chorus goes . . . kinda like this:

* * *

All the roads in the world lead to home, sweet home;
They all lead the other way, too.
Some have to stay, and some have to go,
And some are just passin' through.

* * *

No more passin' through for us; the McSquatleys are here for the duration or until the Millenium, whichever comes last. The fast lane is no place for a '67 VW Microbus, anyhow.

"Where I live" has appeared in The Journal of Kentucky Studies
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Fred Chappell

"Poetry is the most fun. It's the hardest. It's the noblest..."

Pat Arnow.
Fred Chappell.

Fred Chappell is seated on one of the comfortable sofas in the Tennessee Room of the student Center at ETSU, addressing a group about his poetry, stories and novels. When a latecomer (a woman) interrupts the talk the writer rises and remains standing until the visitor finds a seat.

He is talking about where he finds ideas — "everywhere: memory, a chance remark, something you read in the newspaper. You steal everything you can. If I had a motto to put on a brass plaque over my desk, that's what I'd put. I don't really invent. I never met a writer who invented his material. I think Kafka was a great inventor, but I've never met any of those kind of guys."

In his latest novel, *I Am One of You Forever*, Chappell turned to the stories of his childhood in Western North Carolina. "This time I thought I'd rely on Appalachian folk tales — windies, we used to call them. I didn't know that people were going to take me so thoroughly to task for writing some dumb practical jokes."

I Am One of You Forever does indeed tell about some practical jokes. "Comedy is our defense against pain," says the author. "Writing humor is very difficult for me. In the first place, it's hard to think of anything funny and in the second place, having thought of it, after putting it down on the page I don't want to cut it. That's the hardest thing in the world for me. If the thing is even faintly amusing — to realize it doesn't belong there and have to throw away my nice joke — oh, that hurts!"

There is something of himself in the character of the young boy, Jess, in *I Am One of You Forever*. "He's a lot more like I would have liked to have been as a kid and really wasn't. I wasn't such a nice little boy as Jess is. I like Jess as a character. He just stands around. The more passive I can get a character the better I like it. Then things can happen around him."

He likes the other people in the novel, too. "It was fun for me to write a book at last in which I liked all the characters. Obviously you've got to have some tension and conflict, but in this one, the conflict comes from other things. It comes from the world at large, from 20th century civilization. Also, to tell the truth, I drew a lot of the characters from people I knew as a kid, people in Madison County, some actual members of my family, many of them long dead. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it more than a real family reunion, to tell the truth."

The characters will stay alive and move into more recent history in sequels that Chappell has planned. He will also continue writing poetry. "Poetry is the most fun. It's the hardest. It's the noblest of all endeavors of civilized man, as far as I'm concerned. The thing I dislike about prose, it's so much housecleaning. You always got to get people in and out of the room. You got to put clothing on them. You've got to empty the ashtrays. You've got to find out what the weather is. You've got to find out all this dumb stuff, while in poetry you leave out."

A Prayer for the Mountains

Fred Chappell

Let these peaks have happened.

The hawk-haunted knobs and hollers,
The blind coves, blind as meditation, the white
Rock-face, the laurel hells, the terraced pasture ridge
With its broom sedge combed back by wind:
Let these have taken place, let them be place.

And where Rich Fork drops uprushing against
Its tabled stones, let the gray trout
Idle below, its dim plectrum a shadow
That marks the stone's clear shadow.

In the slow glade where sunlight comes through
In circlets and moves from leaf to fallen leaf
Like a tribe of shining bees, let
The milk-flecked fawn lie unseen, unfearing.

Let me lie there too and share the sleep
Of the cool ground's mildest children.

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Lisa Alther

"I think those early years, when you're a child growing up, first experiencing the world, are such powerful ones. They're indelible and you carry them with you the rest of your life..."

Lisa Alther's home in the foothills of the Green Mountains in Vermont looks not too different from her first home. "It's a lot like East Tennessee in terms of the lay of the land and the local people. The only difference is that it's covered in snow six months of the year." Later in the interview she notes another difference in Vermont, a difference in conversational style. "There doesn't seem to be the same fascination with gossip." She remembers that growing up in Kingsport, "there was a sort of conversational style that was very anecdotal. People didn't have abstract, theoretical discussions. They sat around and told little anecdotes about things that they'd seen or heard during the day — usually with some kind of humorous twist. I got used to talking in terms of telling little stories, vignettes. It turns out to be good training for fiction writing."

Lee Talbert. Courtesy of Johnson City Press.

Lisa Alther.

Working from her farmhouse in the country where she lives with her husband and 17-year-old daughter, Alther is writing her fourth novel. "I used to write a lot of non-fiction — free lance — but since *Kinflicks* came out in 1975 I've written novels exclusively. I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to spend most of my time and energy doing what I really love and want to do, and it's because *Kinflicks* was a best seller. It kind of set me up."

Though she has not lived in the South since she was 18, Alther is generally defined as a Southern writer. "My first two books were very much about the South, especially the middle one, *Original Sins*. My third book, *Other Women*, was set in New England and had nothing to do with Southerness. I've just started my fourth novel, just barely begun it. It'll probably be three or four years before it's finished. It's set in New England also. I guess I'm writing myself out of being a Southern writer.

"I may very well come back to dealing with the South again. I don't feel finished with it, and it's certainly some of the most vivid material in my memory. I think those early years, when you're a child growing up, first experiencing the world, are such powerful ones. They're indelible and you carry them with you the rest of your life. In that sense, I would always think of myself as a Southern writer."

Another label that often gets attached to Alther is "feminist" writer. She hesitates before calling herself a feminist. "I guess it depends on what feminist means. I've always thought of it meaning a certain discontent with the power structure in society. If that's what it means, I'm certainly a feminist.

"I think I've been quite helped by the women's movement. *Kinflicks* came out when there were a whole bunch of novels by women first starting to appear on the scene, I mean feminist women writers. It was a fad with the publishers — they all had to have their novels by women. I benefitted enormously by all that, both financially and also in terms of having an interested reading audience."

At least once a year, Alther returns to Kingsport to visit her parents. Three times in recent years she has also conducted readings and workshops at ETSU. She takes her visits to the South more in stride than some of the characters in her novels. "I don't feel that sense of dislocation that they do. I guess I never did. I was making it up, using my imagination."

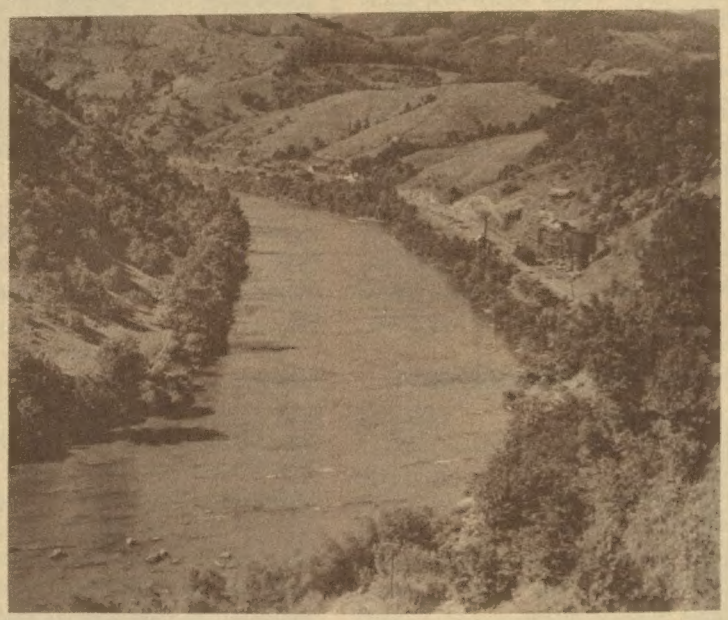
Whenever she comes back to the region, she likes to visit her father's farm. "We spent a lot of time there when we were kids. I always like to go out there. There's a log cabin and a pond and fields and woods. I just walk around, look and remember."

From *Kinflicks*

Lisa Alther

Rather than spiraling down into fiery death, the plane began its normal descent into the Crockett River valley. As it emerged from the fluffy white clouds, Ginny could see the Crockett, forking all along its length into hundreds of tiny capillarylike tributaries that interpenetrated the forested foothills and flashed silver in the sun. The treed bluffs on either side of the river were crimped like a pie crust of green Play Doh.

Soon Hullsport itself was beneath them, its defunct docks crumbling into the Crockett. They were low enough now so that the river, having had its moment of poetry from higher up, looked more like its old self—a dark muddy yellow frothed with chemical wastes from the Major's factory. The river valley containing the town was ringed by red clay foothills, which were gashed with deep red gullies from indiscriminate clearing for housing developments. From eight thousand feet Ginny's home town looked like a case of terminal acne.



Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University.

She could see the factory now, a veritable city of red brick buildings, their hundreds of windows reflecting the yellow-brown of the river. Dozens of huge white waste tanks, crisscrossed with catwalks of ladders like the stitching on softballs, lined the river bank. Behind the tanks bubbled and swirled murky aeration ponds. Vast groves of tall red tile stacks were exhaling the harmless-looking puffy white smoke that had settled in over the valley like the mists of Nepal, and had given Hullsport the distinction of harboring the vilest air for human lungs of any town its size in a nation of notoriously vile air.

The factory was having its revenge on Hullsport. It had never really been included in the town plan. Everyone knew that it was essential to the economy, in this region that relied mostly on dirt farming and coal mining. But aesthetically the factory had offended; and so it had been stuck out in the low flat flood plain of the Crockett, like an outhouse screened from view behind a mansion. But, like any suppressed or ignored or despised human function, the scorned factory had come to dominate life in Hullsport anyway through its riot of noxious exudations.

On the opposite side of the river from the factory, connected to it by a railroad bridge, a foot bridge, and an auto bridge, was the town of Hullsport itself—the Model City, it had been nicknamed by its founder, Ginny's grandfather, her mother's father, Zedediah Hull, or Mr. Zed as everyone had referred to him. Faced with a lifetime in the coal mines of southwest Virginia, he had packed it in to come to this area of Tennessee. Then he had gone north and, in spite of his doubtful accent, had persuaded Westwood Chemical Company of Boston to open a plant in his as-yet-unbuilt model town and to back his project financially. At that time the rural South was regarded by northern businesses as prime ground for colonization, with all the attractions of any underdeveloped country—cheap land, grateful and obedient labor, low taxes, plentiful raw materials, little likelihood of intervention from local government. Mr. Zed then hired a world-famous town planner to draw up plans for Shangri-La South.

From the plane window, Ginny could see the scattered remnants of this original plan. Five large red brick churches—all various shades of Protestantism, all with white steeples of different design—surrounded a central green. From the church green ran Hull Street, which was lined with furniture stores, department stores, clothing stores, movie theaters, newsstands, finance companies, banks. At the far end of the street, facing the church circle and bordering on the river, was the red brick train station for the Crockett Railroad. The train station and the church circle were the two poles, worldly and otherworldly, that had been yoked together to pattern and energize the surrounding town. Out from this central axis radiated four main streets. Side streets joined these main streets in a pattern on concentric hexagons. Private houses lined the side streets. Squinting so as to see just the original pattern, and not what had been done to it since, Ginny decided that it looked almost like a spider web.

Alas, the master builders of the Model City in 1919 hadn't foreseen the domination of Hullsport life by the motor car. No parking space to speak of had been planned for the church circle or the shopping street, and it was now almost impossible to work your way to Hull Street and back out again during the day. Consequently, half a dozen large shopping plazas and a bustling interstate highway now circled the original hexagon. The farmers, who had come into Hullsport every Saturday of Ginny's childhood in their rusting Ford pickups to sell a few vegetables and buy supplies and swap gossip down by the train station while squirting brown streams of tobacco juice through crooked teeth, were no longer in evidence. The railroad and the river shipping business had gone bankrupt, victims of competition with long-distance trucking. The red brick train station, with its garish late Victorian gingerbread, was deserted and vandalized, with obscene drawings and slogans painted all over the interior walls by the initiates of the Hullsport Regional High School fraternities. The station served now as a hangout for the town derelicts and delinquents and runaways, who congregated there at night to drink liquid shoe polish.

Nor had the town fathers, specifically Ginny's grandfather, anticipated the Dutch elm disease, which had killed off most of

the big old trees within the hexagon proper and had left Hullsport looking like a raw new frontier town, baked under the relentless southern sun. Nor had he imagined that six times as many people as he had planned for would one day want to leave the farms and mines and crowd into Hullsport, and that clumps of houses for them would ring the hexagon in chaotic, eczema-like patches.

Hullsport, Tennessee, the Model City, Pearl of the Crockett River valley, birthplace of such notables as Mrs. Melody Dawn Bledsoe, winner of the 1957 National Pillsbury Bake-Off, as a banner draped across Hull Street had reminded everyone since. Spawning ground of Joe Bob Sparks, All-South running back for the University of Northeastern Tennessee Renegades—and prince charming for a couple of years to Virginia Hull Babcock, Persimmon Plains Burly Tobacco Festival Queen of 1962. Ginny was prepared to acknowledge that time spent as Persimmon Plains Burly Tobacco Festival Queen sounded trivial in the face of personal and global extinction; but it was as tobacco queen that she had first understood why people were leaving their tobacco farms to crowd into Hullsport and work at the Major's munitions plant, why there were no longer clutches of farmers around the train station on Saturday mornings.

The plane was making its approach now to the pockmarked landing strip that Hullsport called its airport. Ginny could see the shadow of the plane passing over her childhood hermitage below—a huge white neo-Georgian thing with pillars and a portico across the front, a circular drive, a grove of towering magnolia trees out front which at that very moment would be laden with intoxicating cream-colored blossoms. It looked from a thousand feet up like the real thing—an authentic antebellum mansion. But it was a fraud. Her grandfather, apparently suffering the bends from a too-rapid ascent from the mines, had built it in 1921 on five hundred acres of farmland. It was copied from a plantation house in the delta near Memphis. The design clearly wasn't intended for the hills of east Tennessee. Hullsport had expanded to meet the house, which was now surrounded on three sides by housing developments. But behind the house stretched the farm—a tobacco and dairying operation run now by none other than Clem Cloyd, Ginny's first lover, whose father before him had run the farm for Ginny's grandfather and father. The Cloyds' small maroon-shingled house was diagonally across the five hundred acres from Ginny's house. And at the opposite end, in a cleared bowl ringed by wooded foothills, across the invisible Virginia state line, was the restored log cabin that Ginny's grandfather had withdrawn to toward the end of his life, in disgust with the progressive degradation of the Model City.

As she swooped down from the clouds to take the pulse of her ailing mother, Ginny felt a distinct kinship with the angel of death. "I couldn't ask the boys to come," Mrs. Yancy's note had said. "They've got their own lives. Sons aren't like daughters." "Indeed," Ginny said to herself in imitation of Miss Head, her mentor at Worthley College, who used to warble the word with a pained grimace on similar occasions.

As they taxied up to the wind-socked cow shed that masqueraded as a terminal, Ginny was reminded of the many times she'd landed there in the past. Her mother had always been addicted to home movie-making and had choreographed the upbringing of Ginny and her brothers through the eyepiece of a camera, eternally poised to capture on Celluloid those golden moments—the first smile, the first step, the first tooth in, the first tooth out, the first day of school, the first dance, year after tedious year. Mother's Kinflicks, Ginny and her brothers had called them. A preview of the Kinflicks of Ginny's arrivals at and departures from this airport would have shown her descending or ascending the steps of neglected DC-7's in a dizzying succession of disguises—a black cardigan buttoned up the back and a too-tight straight skirt and Clem Cloyd's red silk Korean windbreaker when she left home for college in Boston; a smart tweed suit and horn-rim Ben Franklin glasses and a severe bun after a year at Worthley; wheat jeans and a black turtleneck and Goliath sandals after she became Eddie Holzer's lover and dropped out of Worthley; a red Stark's Bog Volunteer Fire Department Women's Auxiliary blazer after her marriage to Ira Bliss. In a restaurant after ordering, she always ended up hoping that the kitchen would be out of her original selection so that she could switch to what her neighbor had. That was the kind of person she was. Panhandlers asking for bus fare to visit dying mothers, bald saffron-robed Hare Krishna devotees with finger cymbals, Jesus freaks carrying signs reading "Come to the Rock and You Won't Have to Get Stoned Anymore" — all these poeple had invariably sought her out on the crowded Common when she had lived in Boston with Eddie. She had to admit that she was an easy lay, spiritually speaking. Apparently she looked lost and in need, anxious and dazed and vulnerable, a ready convert. And in this case appearances weren't deceiving. It was quite true. Normally she was prepared to believe in anything. At least for a while.

Ginny remembered, upon each descent to this airport, spotting her mother and the Major from the plane window—each time unchanged, braced to see what form their protean daughter would have assumed for *this* trip home. When Ginny thought of them, it was as a unit, invincible and invulnerable, halves of a whole, silhouettes, shape and bulk only, with features blurred. She decided it was a holdover from early infancy, when they probably hung over her crib and doted, as parents tended to do before they really got to know their offspring. But this trip home there was no one standing by the fence to film her arrival—in a patchwork peasant dress and combat boots and a frizzy Anglo-Afro hairdo, with a knapsack on her back and a Peruvian llama wool poncho over the pack so that she looked like a hunched crone, the thirteenth witch at Sleeping Beauty's christening. Her mother was lying in a hospital bed; and the Major had "gone beyond," as the undertaker with the waxen yellow hands had optimistically put it a year ago.

Apparently she was on her own now.

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Jo Carson

"There is a language of this place, there's a rhythm to it..."

When writer/actress Jo Carson presents her *People Pieces*, it's not just a poetry reading, it's a performance. Characters come alive, tell their stories, punch you between the eyes and leave to make room for more characters who will also punch you between the eyes. It's effective, which is why Carson has been invited to perform her *People Pieces* all over the country. "It's been a surprise to me. I figured *People Pieces* were regional. And they are, but they have played in other places much better than I expected them to. I've had some explaining to do sometimes. In New York and San Francisco I had to explain about BC powders before anybody understood what

one piece meant. Some places I had to explain about sour mash whiskey. But I find they cross lines as well as anything I ever wrote."

Pat Arnow.

Jo Carson.

In all of her work — plays, poems and short stories — the characters speak with a resonance of the hills of Appalachia. This wasn't always the case. Growing up in Johnson City, Carson wasn't a bit impressed with the voices around her, or with the unique nature of her mountain home. When she was in her early 20's, she moved to New York City.

"I couldn't wait to get away. I wanted to be out of the territory, my family, school, the whole kit 'n' kaboodle. I had no sense of myself as *of* this place." The New York adventure lasted two years. "I came to some sort of political awareness while I was gone about what the region is and what its history is. I don't know why it took leaving to come to that but it did. After I got back I got interested in the history, I got interested in some of the social histories that I had not had any awareness of prior to leaving.

"There is a language of this place, there's a rhythm to it. I started writing *People Pieces* after I got back. It was because for the first time ever I was finding the poetry of the language of the region. What strikes me regularly, still, is the rhythm of the speech that's here. I had spent a good portion of my college career trying to get rid of it. It took being away to show me what was here all the time. It took coming back here to understand about being from a place and of a place and writing what you know and understand. A lot of my work prior to the New York venture was set in place-less places, airplane terminals, places that had no specific center to them. And it was not until I got back here that I began to understand on a real gut level — I mean I could have spouted it but I sure wasn't practicing it — that you need to write about what you know. The only territory I feel like I know very well is this territory. And I sometimes don't know it, it's changing so fast."

"I want to know..."

Jo Carson

I want to know
when you get to be from a place.
5 years, 10, 20?

What about when you find
a place you love?

"But Honey, where are you from?"
It is a discriminatory question
and it turns up everywhere
but job applications.

I am from three states
and six different cities.

I am from Interstate 40.

I am from the neighborhoods
where people moved every other year.

I am from the work my father did.

I am from the things I hang on my wall
and the bed I get out of in the morning.

I am from that suspicious minority
that don't have roots like trees.

I have lived here eight years.
The mountain I see when I wake up
is imprinted like a duck.
I know my mother when I see her.

Can you earn being from a place?
I work, vote, help my neighbors, I pay taxes.
Can I pledge allegiance?

People would do better to ask
"Where are you from?"
of Eastman, or Nuclear Fuels Services
or the waste management company
that left the toxic dump in Bumpass Cove.
And if the identity is so precious,
they should ask it of
Kroger, K-Mart, and Long John Silvers.
But it never goes that far.

It just goes to the property boundary
when my neighbor steps back a step and says
"Oh. You're not from here, are you?"

John Yount

"It takes a lot of labor to bring back any news..."

John Yount doesn't identify his writing with a region. He explains that his family moved around when he was young. Now he lives with his wife and two grown daughters in New Hampshire, where he teaches English at the University of New Hampshire and writes novels. The themes of his work are as diverse as their settings. In *Hardcastle* he wrote about the miners in Harlan County, Kentucky during the great Depression. In *Toots in Solitude* his hero goes through "male menopause."

Pat Arnow.

John Yount.

At ETSU Yount gave some advice to aspiring writers: "Don't do it. Same advice my father gave to me, 'for Christ sake son, be an engineer. Be a dentist. Do something reasonable.' That sounds like a flip answer and I don't mean it to be.

"Most people have a conception that's brilliant, but then you come down to the paper and you start putting the lines on the paper and your original conception doesn't look so good.

"If you start with some philosophical or theological or

sociological proposition, what you're writing is one sort of essay or propoganda or another. You're using your characters as vehicles, stick figures, toward this philosophical proposition. That's not fiction. That's something else. That's the only way I wrote for the first four or five years I wrote. I had some big truth I wanted to lay on the world. I made my characters and situations display that truth. What I wound up with was inevitably wooden, stereotyped, not all that profound — much to my surprise — although I couldn't be told otherwise. I don't think that's the way to work.

"It's the people who are self-satisfied, who know what they're going to do, and they by God do it, who are in deep trouble. That's almost guaranteed to fail. It's almost guaranteed to play down to the lowest common denominator of everybody's intelligence. None of us is so profound that we can just sit down and think wonderfully. It takes a lot of labor to bring back any news.

"Ultimately you not only come up with better ideas, you come up with an idea you really can handle. There's something about writing that's like exploring a continent where no one has ever gone before. How are you going to find your way? Trial and error. You're going to do a lot of wandering around. I think that's necessary. It scares everyone. No matter how many times you've written and had people actually publish the stuff, each new thing you begin is really new, it's just as scary.

"I don't know if there's anything harder than writing naturalistic, realistic fiction. You have to make it believable. Oddly enough, I feel like I can lie when I'm writing non-fiction, but when I am writing fiction, I dare not lie. I want to tell the truth, and I want it to be true. Now, that's screwy. I admit to you that's screwy."

Switch County, Kentucky, Summer 1979

John Yount

In the summer heat he walks down the road into Elkin, her small, soft fist gripping the forefinger he has stuck down for her to hold. She is four, the youngest of his grandchildren up from Knoxville for a visit, and when they get into town, she will have a soft drink, or a Popsicle, whichever strikes her fancy more. He would have bought her a treat in any case, but now it will be, in some part, a reward for forgetting so easily what her older brothers were so curious and worked up about.

"Pappaw," she says, "will you carry me?"

He looks down at her and sees that she is flushed, that under her eyes and across her upper lip there is a fine mist of sweat, and he swings her up and sets her astride his shoulders and walks on. She is a small, light life to carry, and in that alone she seems to offer a gentle, if not quite perfect, absolution for an old man's crimes. For long periods of time he is able to forget them, to put them away so completely that now they seem not quite retrievable. And why should they be? For who would want to remember them as though they were something to be celebrated? He decides he will try to explain that to his grandsons, and maybe to their father as well, when he and his wife come back from their vacation to collect their children once more. He will call him aside, yes, and tell him plainly that there are some things a fellow doesn't strut and crow about.

Beside the road a fence is lush with a burden of honeysuckle, and he steps down into the ditch and plucks a piece of the vine covered in blossoms. "Do what Pappaw does, Darlin," he tells the little girl, "and ye'll get somethin sweet," and he bites off the stem end of one of the flowers and sucks the nectar out before he passes the thick tulle of blossoms up to amuse her. But as he walks along the road with the child astride his neck and flowers of honeysuckle sifting down around him, a bit of his old anger comes back to gnaw at his stomach. The anger is no longer quite so pure, but it remains. And he remembers well enough his time in the Switch County jail waiting for his trial, and he remembers the trial too. Perhaps he would have lost if the National Miners Union hadn't sent a lawyer over from Pikeville to defend him, but there is no gratitude in him. He knew, even then, whose interest the lawyer had come to defend. A few months later, when it was clear the union was broken, the organizers and lawyers and all the rest of the National Miners Union people vanished like smoke. Nor did Arturo Guido Zigerelli ever once show up in Switch County again. Still, that was smart too. For if the people around there were used to men killing each other for one reason or another and found the business between William Music and the Burnsides too close to call, they might have hanged Zigerelli.

Even Turl and Tom Loflin had gotten five years in the penitentiary for blowing up the power plant at Elkin in the wee hours after Regus was killed. But, of course, they couldn't plead self-defense.

"Why are you laughing, Pappaw?" she asks him, bending around to stare at him owlishly from above and a little to one side.

"I don't know," he answers her. "I didn't know I was."

"Would you like a honeysuckle?" she asks him.

"Absolutely," he tells her, and while she reaches down the small trumpets of honeysuckle to his lips and he takes them by touch, he thinks of the mockery of his trial: the prosecutor trying him more for being a member of the National Miners Union than for killing the Burnsides, and his own lawyer trying harder to defend the union than the shooting. They were both the same, those lawyers, he thinks; strutting and posing like senators giving speeches, and the truth nowhere in them. He nibbles her small, silky fingers and she giggles.

"Don't bite me, Pappaw," she says.

"I can't help it," he says. "Ye've made me so hungry, I've got to snappin." But oh, he thinks, when Bydee Flann and Charles Tucker and Ella Bone gave testimony, they turned that trial around. He remembers absolutely the way Ella Bone looked, coming forward to testify on Merlee's arm, her worn hands folded into her dress front, her head held humbly to one side. She and Bydee and Charles Tucker, at least, were an embarrassment to both attorneys; and for a little while what had been a stage for wild invention became merely a crowded, slightly too warm, country courtroom where one could smell the rank tobacco in the spittoons, the odor of unwashed bodies, and the mustiness of clothing ordinarily packed away for special occasions. A place where, momentarily, the humble truth appeared and grieved.

When they get into Elkin, he reaches up and takes her hands and swings her around and down to the ground. "Now," he says, "what do ye crave, Missy? Will ye have a cold drink or a Popsicle or what?"

"I want a Popsicle, an orange one," she tells him, and together they climb the steps to the gallery. It is Green's Supermarket now, not the Hardcastle commissary, but it is the same building; and inside, the wooden floor pops and groans as it did, and it even entices the nostrils with the same smells, never mind that it is air-conditioned. He buys the five pounds of

sugar Merlee has sent him for and two orange Popsicles, which he and his granddaughter eat sitting in split-bottomed chairs on the gallery. Now and then people pass by and speak to him, inquire after his grandchild and tell him she is pretty. They call him Mr. Music, for none of them date back to his time or are so familiar as to call him Bill, although there are a few alive who do so.

But he isn't paying much attention to them. Because of the mood he is in, he looks out on what used to be Hardcastle company housing and tries to resurrect it in his mind. It is hard, for there are some dowdy shops and stores where the first row of houses used to be; yet behind them, a few of the shacks remain. They are painted now, and one or two of them have additions built on, and there are some trees and grass. When he and the little girl walk back, he knows he will look toward the place where the tipple and power plant once stood, and he will try to resurrect them as well, and that will be even more difficult, for no trace of them remains, and even the mountain, which rose above them, is being unwound from strip-mining. Peeled like an apple.

His legs are crossed at the knees, and at the end of his raised, skinny shank, one scuffed work shoe keeps time with his heartbeat while he eats his Popsicle and considers his life. It is not the one he had in mind when he started out, or the one he would have chosen, but merely the one that claimed him. And, all things considered, it has been good enough. Still, years ago he confessed to Bydee Flann that a feeling of homesickness bothered him now and again. But Bydee, while he lived, never lacked an answer for anything. He had been born and raised in Switch County and except for the trip to Chicago, had never been as much as fifty miles away, and he was homesick too, he told Music. "All men are homesick," he'd said, "ever since God Almighty scourged them from the garden."

Maybe so, Music thinks, but he suspects otherwise. He suspects home is simply not a place after all, but a time, and when it's gone, it's gone forever. He twiddles his foot and agrees with himself.

"What did you say, Pappaw?" she asks him.

He has no idea. "I said less us get on back and see what them mean little brothers of yours are a-doin."

The sun is dropping behind the ridge above Mink Slide, and it is cooler. He looks, as he knew he would, at the mountain across the river, at its raw and naked terraces, and he clucks to himself. Hellkatoot, he thinks, if Regus were alive, he wouldn't even know where he was, nor would Ella. And all at once, out of nowhere, he understands something. He understands why his two small grandsons, clearly too young for such matters, were told he had once shot down a pair of deputy sheriffs. It is suddenly as plain as a pikestaff to him that he has become some sort of oddity, some sort of curiosity, to his youngest son. No doubt Switch County has too. And why wouldn't it be all right to tell any kind of story about an oddity, after all? Sure, going off to school, living so long away from home in a city with a good job and a fine house, has given the boy notions. Music realizes he has sensed it before and couldn't quite put a name to it. He can even understand it a little, but he decides it cuts no mustard with him, is no proper excuse, and he intends to collar his son and take him aside.

In a little while he and his granddaughter come in sight of the huge chicken house he raised in the forties, the field around it covered with hundreds of white pullets; and a little beyond, the new house he built in the fifties, where the kitchen garden used to be; and a little beyond and below that, the old one, still standing, which he could never persuade Ella to leave. And somehow he relents a little. The boys have been sent off to fish the river with their brand-new and untried rods and reels. They will catch very little, for he could see at once they had no experience to help them. Perhaps he should teach them real fishing, depression fishing, where you wade the river and, when the fish spook under the bank or under rocks, you reach in after them and grab them. It was one of the ways he got grub for Ella and Aunt Sylvie and Merlee and Anna Mae during the hard times, and he feels up to showing his grandsons how.

As he and the little girl mount the dirt road up to the house, he remembers with perfect clarity a particular March evening in 1932, and how he had climbed up out of the river, his bare feet purple with the cold and his clothes soaked, but carrying enough fish in the sack over his shoulder to feed the five of them, for he had worked hard and culled nothing. He remembers sitting in the withered bracken to lace his brogans about his sockless shanks, realizing at last that the worst of the season was over. Already a few red-winged blackbirds had shown up to ride the slender tips of the elderberry bushes along the river and fluff their feathers and creak to each other like rusty hinges. In no more than a week or so, he knew, he would be able to gather pokeweed and dock and other wild greens for them to eat. He remembers climbing the riverbank to the highway and coming in view of what had once been Easy Street and Silk Stocking Row, and how nothing remained of them but the heavily trodden earth and a little debris, as though what had once been squatterville might have been only the abandoned site of a carnival. And he remembers vividly how, in the aspect of that particular evening, he could look upon the place without so much bitterness and shame.

Yes, he thinks, he will teach his grandsons a different manner of fishing. And perhaps he will tell them stories, and if not quite the story they wish to hear, then maybe stories about Chicago and riding the freights, or getting caught sleeping in Regus Bone's haystack. Perhaps, indeed, he will tell them Regus's story about shooting the bear and getting trapped in the hollow tree with its mother. He wonders, after all, if it won't be all the same to them.

from Hardcastle *by John Yount: Copyright © John Yount, used by permission of the author and St. Martin's Press, Inc.*

Don Johnson

"You just create characters and put them in situations and say 'what if...' "

The way Don Johnson moved from his first home in the Kanawha River Valley of West Virginia to his present one in Johnson City is even less direct than the winding mountain roads that connect the two places. His route spanned the globe — Germany and Hawaii have been home to him, as have Masachusetts, Wisconsin and Virginia. In his book of poetry, *The Importance of Visible Scars*, he covers the distant territories that he came to know, and the more familiar mountain terrain.

The mountains are what drew him back to the region. For the past three years he's been the head of the English Department at ETSU. "The area appeals to me. I never felt fully at home in Massachusetts. It was an urban Northeastern area. I like to get up in the morning and see mountains." The vision of East Tennessee hills isn't exactly a repeat of a boyhood view. As a child he could see the mountains only "on a good day

when the smog from the factories and the chemical plants wasn't rampant. The area of West Virginia that I came from was not the most picturesque part of the state."

He has found poetry everywhere he has lived, in a tatooed woman rising out of the ocean on a Hawaiin beach, in pigeons disrupted by a fire in Connecticut, from his father telling a story about a fishing hole in West Virginia.

Pat Arnow

Don Johnson.

Yet, wherever the poems are set, they are always flavored by the language of his youth in West Virginia. "No question about it. Even if I write poems about other places, I keep coming back to there. And even the poems I'm writing about Tennessee are really in some respects about that part of West Virginia. I think the people are essentially the same, and it all comes out of that earlier experience. The dialect is very similar. The sounds. Characters. I think if I hadn't lived there for that time and known those people and that kind of air that I couldn't have written the poems about Butler."

The Butler poems are Johnson's newest work, a series about an East Tennessee town that the Tennessee Valley Authority flooded in the making of Lake Watauga in 1949. In 1983, shortly after Johnson and his family moved to the area, the TVA drained the lake for repairs to the dam (they call it a draw-down), and the ruins of the town were exposed.

"The draw-down in '83 went pretty much to the original river. I saw the lake when it was drawn down, but I didn't actually go to Butler. I wanted to, and I didn't want to. I wanted it to be what it was supposed to be in my mind. All these Butler poems are purely imaginative things. You just create characters and put them in situations and say 'what if...' " He also is inspired by stories he has heard, bits of poetry, like the former resident he read about who said, "I've never left. Every night before I go to bed, the water starts pouring over my living room walls."

Alden Crowe's Stubbornness Rewarded

Don Johnson

He didn't know he'd done right
until the wires were strung,
current pouring through walls
still giving off the faint odor
of lamp oil. Wired,
he had light awaiting his touch
in every room. Warmth held
him in sleep like a new bride.

When he woke to the scratch
of leaves on the side porch
in winter, one moment's
listening would pick up,
beneath the season's dry rattle,
the Frigidaire's sustaining hum—
small echo of the turbine's roar
six miles away. He had said

she was born there and she could
by God stay, six feet or six hundred,
what difference did it make?
But he didn't know if that county
of water pulled over her bones,
or cold everlasting without even
the frost's delicate flowering
would matter.

His first summer on high ground
no dripping spectre harrowed
his sleep, but dampness no fire
could banish lapped at his new foundation.
His feet never warmed and he dreamed
repeatedly of drowning, until
the linemen came. Connected, he dreamed once
of her emerald ghost turning to water.

The House in the Woods

Don Johnson

Why have you come here
to this place you say
you never liked, where
mockingbirds read your mind

and every vine along the path
lies hourglassed in shadow?
If one should rise up
like the stepfather's hand

you hated, your scream
might lift the head
of a deer out of berry canes
or startle the owl from sleep

in the dark kitchen rafters.
This far from the blacktop
no one would hear. But you
hear everything: the whisper

of chintz in the window
he once nailed shut,
cornered leaves turning over,
the tolerant creak as the house

accepts your intrusion. Everything,
but the voices that still
carve up your dreams.
Is that it? Does this listening

silence the past? Or will it
come back, like the owl
after you have swept these floors
clean and locked the door?

Jim Wayne Miller

"I want my words to sound as natural sounds of their place..."

Pat Arrow.

Jim Wayne Miller.

Poet and teacher Jim Wayne Miller seems reluctant to read his own work, but he quotes from many others, a vast and varied group including Thomas Wolfe, Goethe, Donald Davidson, Kurt Vonnegut, Cormac McCarthy, James Still, Wallace Stevens and Loyal Jones. What he is trying to get across with all these scholarly references, is that writers must hold onto a sense of place, must write in the language they know. "What I am looking for is a voice. And it's a voice that sounds like it comes from somewhere instead of just anywhere." This isn't the modernist idea, he says.

"Especially in the United States, there's been a kind of extraterritoriality that people have striven for. They've sought not to be associated with any particular place or any particular background. I think we're right now in the middle of a time when that's turning around. This happens over and over again in literary history. You look and you'll see as soon as people become bored with experimental things in fiction or poetry, they return to a consideration of place.

"I want my words to sound as natural sounds of their place. And the things that you see as a result of listening to the poems or reading the poems, I want those things to be invisible elements of the place made somehow visible. "Poetry is not all invention. It's partly discovery. You have to deal with what's there, with what's given, and that means you have to know your place.

"We don't know our place. We don't know its history. We are a part of the South but we're a different part of the South than the one that gets mentioned, mostly. And the one that gets mentioned mostly is one that doesn't exist and never did exist. Did you know that we are now being perceived as one of the many ethnic groups in the United States? In the Southern Appalachians we have an image that is sort of like what people get out of *Foxfire* and what they get out of the Waltons and then we have this other one of dreadful deprivation and backwardness and ignorance and so forth. We're a place where people park their feelings in what they think is Appalachia. If what they're feeling is afraid, it comes out *Deliverance*, and if they're feeling more positively, then we get a little pastoral. We're just the best people in the world in that version. And of course, both do us damage.

"I want to stress here that oftentimes we've had inquisitive strangers coming into our region and it is too easy to say 'they don't know us.' Sometimes they know things about ourselves that we don't know about ourselves.

"Where is our literary heritage in this part of the country? Lots of people say you don't have one, but we do. It's an oral tradition."

Miller's own poetry, six separate volumes, is clearly connected to the oral traditions of his youth in in Western North Carolina. He has put songs and stories and superstitions into his work, and emerged with a voice that speaks of his unique place.

Quick Trip Home

Jim Wayne Miller

The prop-jet brings me in from Washington at 2:03 p.m.
An hour later, in a rented Pinto, I'm out
in the country, back home. Early September. Cloudy.

In 1907 a teacher of the Brick Church subscription school
here at the foot of Hanlon Mountain made entries in her diary
(I have that diary in a stringbag on the seat beside me):
"Thurs. Sept. 3. Attended church, the usual thing, etc."

Years later, when a movie was made here, no wonder
people vied with one another: Burn my barn! Mine!
"Cloudy. Attended church, the usual thing, etc."

I know these woods were full of gnomes once.
Trolls came out from under the bridge and walked along
Temporary 63. I didn't think so then. It was just
wart-faced Clayton Rogers, who took shortcuts
through the woods (and people's yards), a huge bundle
of laundry balanced on his back, beetle with an outsized
ball of dung, humping home to his wife, her slat bonnet,
her steaming black washpot out by the smokehouse.

Or it was only Whitey King, the red-eyed albino,
or Running Jack Sterling, running away from the County Home,
or Weaver Sams, there on the mountain where
the retired Florida car dealer has a house now,
whose cabin I came down to once, to find him sitting
in the open door, listening to the World Series
on a battery-powered radio, eating chinquapins, blowing
the black hulls off his tongue into the dirt yard.

There are Bedouin tribesmen who carry
battery radios on their camels. There are old men
who speak Eskimo and wear tennis shoes,
whose grandsons speak English and wear mukluks.

In 1907 the teacher wrote in her diary:
I have been reading in a desultory way.

A woman goes on a crusade to defend
the integrity of the family — and then divorces.

A man writes about an old-fashioned way of life he lived,
describes its pleasures, a certain serenity and knowledge
that comes from living a long time in one place —
and does this so many times, in so many places,
he grows harried and distracted.

Late afternoon. At a turnaround on a logging road
I stand in a drizzle drinking beer with my brother.

They found Weaver Sams on a logging road
one January morning, face down in a frozen rut,
beaten to death with a tire tool.
Face had to be chopped out of the ice.
Beaded rain runs off the hood of the red pickup
when my brother raises the hood. We stand under dripping
oak leaves drinking beer, puzzling over the motor.
He pushes back his CAT hat, scratches his head.

"Thurs. eve. Slight rain falling."

Not far from here a huge white dish high on a ridge
is aimed at the RCA SATCOM Satellite.
I didn't know why that dish was there until this morning
when I sat in a meeting puzzling over a budget
whose figures were expressed in thousands.
The Chairman said: A motion has been made...
An Executive Director said: Move on to the next slide.
A board member said: You say there are 45 stations
receiving the program, but what is the universe?

In 1907 the teacher wrote in her diary:
Am hearty but nervous.

Today I have smelled honeysuckle and gunpowder,
jet fuel and hot cornbread.
Today I have heard punk rock and foxhounds,
felt crushed velvet and a mule's nose.
Today I have passed through a smokehouse door
and airport metal detectors.

Today my father pointed to a pretty girl in an album
(a younger sister of the teacher who kept the diary):
"That one like to a been your Mama."

Arthritis has burled my mother's fingers,
swollen her wrists and ankles. My pretty mother.
Once she had her good days and her bad days.
Now she has her bad days.
A Cherokee Indian nearby is peddling DMSO for swollen joints.
My mother wants me to get her some.
I check by telephone with a chemist friend.
"You have to be very careful with that stuff."

My brother's head is under the hood of the pickup,
his beer can balanced on the radiator. He mumbles, tinkers.

A gladness: the red-tailed hawk, though perched there
on a powerline in this drizzle, still hunts.

Am hearty but nervous.
What is the universe?

from Nostalgia for 70, *published by Seven Buffaloes Press, Box 249, Big Timber, Montana 59011.* *(See Review on page 28.)* *Reprinted by permission of the author.*

Johnson City Tennessee 1983 **Photo by Michael Smith**

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

An outing of the family and friends of Virginia Abrahms. The handwritten remark on the back of this old-time postcard reads, "Just a little mule brigade among the aristocrats of the outside world." It's signed "Fool Head." From the Abrahms Family Collection of Rogersville, Tennessee. Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University.

NOW AND THEN

Highway 65 at Fort Blackmore, Virginia. From *A Portriat of Appalachia* **by Kenneth Murray, published by Appalachian Corsortium Press, Boone, North Carolina, 1985.** © Copyright Kenneth Murray

Seventy-five Years of School

Frank Williams Writes the Book on ETSU

Pat Arnow

On the phone Frank Williams is cordial and joking. He is most willing to talk about what he has learned in his five years of research and writing about the 75 year history of East Tennessee State University. "You know one time Culp came to a meeting, chuckling about the university president who died and went to hell and it took him three days to realize he wasn't on campus." He gives directions to his office, "It's room 104 of Rogers-Stout Hall. It's easy to find. Follow the smell of cigar smoke." This particular item turns out not to be a joke. The smell of a stogie fills the narrow hallway of a classroom building. At its source, a small corner office, Professor Emeritus, Frank Williams is enjoying his morning smoke and looking as a retired professor should, in an argyle sweater vest, brown wing- tipped shoes and striped tie. The office is right, too, with its cluttered wooden desk, Royal manual typewriter and shelves filled with mementoes and old books.

Courtesy of the office of University Relations, ETSU.

Frank Williams in his office in Rogers-Stout Hall.

Using the tape recorder won't bother him, he says, but adds, "Oh, I cringe every time I hear myself on tape. I sound like Andy Griffith." He does have a drawl, one not of East Tennessee. It's more Southern than the twang here, a voice from the Memphis area where he was born and raised. "My hometown is Savannah. When I say Savannah, provincial people say, 'Oh, Georgia!' and I say, 'Hell, NO! Tennessee! Don't be provincial.' It's in the southwest part of the state, on the Tennessee River."

Since 1949 he's lived on this end of Tennessee, teaching history at ETSU for thirty years. "I enjoyed teaching. I think most professors are ham actors. One likes to have a captive audience."

In 1981, after he had been retired for a couple of years the university asked him to write the history of the school. Katie Williams, the professor's wife of forty-five years, complains that her husband still seems to work as much as he did before he retired. But Williams doesn't consider this project that has become a 509 page manuscript a chore. He has enjoyed his time in the university archives, digging through the old student publications, and through hundreds of boxes of presidential papers. He likes all of it — the formal history of dates, places, and events and the informal one of anecdotes, customs and temperament of the times. Puffing on his cigar, he leans back in his squeaky swivel chair and tells the story.

"Not too many people went to college in the 1880s, 90's and on into the early 1900's. Any person who was a graduate of the eighth grade and was 16 years old and could pass a state examination could go out and teach in the rural schools.

"A movement to create state supported teacher education schools, normal schools they were called, started in Massachusetts. The idea caught on. In Tennessee, a native of Monroe County, Sidney Gordon Gilbreath, and some of his colleagues in education began a campaign in 1903 to modernize the school system, to create normal schools here. Mr. Gilbreath had taught in Monroe County, had been county superintendent and had been president of Washington College all before he was 26 years old. He was appointed state superintendent of education in 1895 at the tender age of 26.

"The General Education Act finally passed in 1909, creating four normal schools, three white and one black. They had to select the sites and there was considerable politicking, but in due time they selected Murfreesboro, Nashville, Memphis and Johnson City. The state board then chose East Tennessean Gilbreath for Johnson City.

"In selecting faculty Gilbreath deliberately chose as many qualified and experienced natives of East Tennessee as he could find because he said they'd 'understand the needs of these poor boys and gals coming to the normal school to be trained as teachers.' It was a surprisingly cosmopolitan group - assuming that an education will help take the country out of the man. For example, Edwin Wexler Kennedy was the only Ph.D. among the first faculties of the four normals. David Sinclair Burleson — 'Sinky' to his friends — held degrees from Milligan and the University of Virginia, and had attended the University of Chicago and Harvard.

"The East Tennessee State Normal School opened on October of 1909 with four buildings and a student enrollment of around 150. It was a four-year high school with two years at the college level. It didn't cost too much to go to normal school, less

Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia.

Carter Hall, the women's dormitory.

than $150 dollars a year in the earlier days.

"Most of the students were young women who lived in the dormitory under strict rules. (The male students lived off campus.) The girls could receive 'callers' in the parlors on Sunday afternoons; young men not enrolled in school had to be approved by the matron. Girls should not abuse the privilege by having too many 'callers.' Girls could attend movies in chaperoned groups once or twice a week. They were fined 10 cents for being late at meals and for having untidy rooms. They were expected to be in their rooms studying after 7:00 p.m. and in bed by 10:30.

"From time to time the girls politely petitioned for changes. Uncle Sid, as the students referred to Gilbreath, didn't give in too much, though. In fact, in 1912, Gilbreath decided that girls had to be chaperoned when dining out and could not attend public dances."

The faculty women were a bit more independent. Williams' favorite story has to do with Delle Dulaney Smith, a charter faculty member. "Would you like to hear about the school's first parking problem?" he asks, his blue eyes sparkling. This is a story he repeats whenever he talks about the normal school days, in the numerous speeches he gives to "Rotarians, Kiwanians, to book clubs — word gets around that there's someone around who can give a talk," he explains.

"Delle Dulaney Smith was a 'liberated' woman long before the adjective became trite. She also was the first person to have a parking problem on the campus — it was about 1914. Delle was an accomplished horsewoman who rode astride when most women rode sidesaddle. She tethered her horse in front of the administration building — now known as Gilbreath Hall. One day Uncle Sid noticed the horse pawing up the sod and asked Delle to use the hitching rack behind the building. According to the legend, she told the president to attend to his own affairs. She would teach chemistry and tether her horse where she damned well pleased."

The professor cannot swear to the absolute truth of this anecdote (or some of his other favorites). "You don't know. They're part of the myths and legends, but they make good stories."

Delle Dulaney Smith had some other, more well-documented troubles with the administration. In 1923, "Gilbreath brought in an 'ABD' to teach advanced chemistry — presidents could do that in the days before search committees and equal opportunity laws — and relegated Delle to biology and first-year chemistry. She protested when she saw the schedule and refused to meet the biology class. Gilbreath fired her. Delle brought suit for breach of contract while her influential friends appealed to Governor Austin Peay. Gilbreath stood his ground, and Delle lost her suit all the way to the Supreme Court."

Uncle Sid got along well with the rest of the faculty, Williams says, but he did have his troubles. While the school was prospering and growing, "his position with the board was getting weaker, you know, you build up enemies. But when Gilbreath resigned in 1925, he had achieved his major aim, that is, the normal school had become a four year teaching college. He went with a book publisher. Then he came back here for retirement."

Professor Williams got to know the university's first president then. "When I knew him he was in his 80's. He was a great big man, tall. He was a raconteur. He liked to tell stories. He was interested in ghost stories. I didn't know I was going to be writing a history of the university. I didn't ask him about it. He was just an interesting person, and smart, too."

The next president was Dr. Charles Sherrod from 1925 to 1949. "He was tne one that employed me. By the time I came, Dr. Sherrod had realized he had made a mistake in employing me and asked for early retirement." He chuckles, then says, "That would make a good story." The dean in those days was "Sinky" Burleson, another of the charter faculty members.

"Burleson was out of touch with reality on occasion. They tell all sorts of stories on him. When he was dean, he announced that the boy and girls were not supposed to wear anything except tennis shoes on the tennis courts, and he never did understand why laughter swept over the auditorium. Another time the deputy sheriff called up and said he caught a boy and girl naked up on the Reservoir Hill. The dean was somewhat upset about that. The next morning he stopped Tom Carson, you ever heard of Tom Carson? Tom had an awful lot of common sense, and Burleson said, 'Tom I don't know what I'm going to do. They caught a boy and girl naked up on Reservoir Hill, parked in a car.' Tom thought, now I don't think it could be anything like that, so he called the deputy sheriff. And the deputy sheriff said, 'no, they were up there NECKING.' Dean Burleson was innocent of the slang expressions of the day and he interpreted necking as naked. Tom had to explain the facts of life to him and calm him down, and he just died laughing."

Williams recalls Tom Carson, who taught at the college for many years, and his wife, "Miss Agnes," with great fondness. And he recalls a locally famous story about Carson. "He had a magnificent yard over on Eighth Avenue. One time, he was out working in the yard, one hot summer day — sweaty. I don't know if he had on old overalls or khakis, but anyway, this big long Cadillac came down the street with this woman driving. And she watched Tom as he went about his work. Then she pushed the button, this was right after they had electric windows, she pushed the window and it went down and she

said, 'my good man, I've been observing you. You seem to be a very careful workman. Do you do this for a living?' 'Yes ma'am, I spend right much time working on this.' 'I need a yard man. I wonder if I could employ you. How much to you charge?' And he says, 'Well, not too much, but the lady of the house takes right good care of me. Feeds me three hot meals a day and lets me sleep with her at night.' Horrified look, long pause, then the window went up, and the car went on down."

When Williams came to Johnson City to teach, the college was no longer just a teacher's school, it was East Tennessee State College and there were 2,000 part-time and full-time students. That year, Burgin Dossett, a one-time candidate for governor, was appointed president of the school by the man who had defeated him, Gordon Browning. "Dossett was from Campbell County — Jacksboro, Lafollette, closer to the Kentucky line, but he was an old mountaineer. He had an excellent mind, went to Harvard and got his master's degree and then he came back to Campbell County and got into politics."

Williams confirms that in the 50's the students were pathetically apathetic. "They just let the administration run over them. Some of the few activated were complaining about the 'silent generation.' The students would not demonstrate — make known their needs and wants and demands. When we got into the Vietnam War, which was unpopular in the 60's, they got activated."

His observations about the students come not only from being on the campus then, but from going through *The Blue and the Gray*. "It was a student newspaper. It had a lot of sophomoric jokes, short stories and anecdotes. They also have some underground newspapers in the archives that came out in the 70's. Oh, they were militant! They had non-negotiable demands. It reflects the spirit of the times. We did not have nearly the trouble they had at Columbia or the University of California or some of the larger schools, but we had some problems here."

It was D.P. Culp who was president during the student upheavals. Williams recalls, "One night they were going to have a demonstration on campus, and they asked several faculty people to come out. I was one of them. They called Culp out of his house over here where the student center is. The president lived on campus then. He came out and they were shouting obscenities, it was embarrassing. He was trying to explain why he could not meet the demands of having open dormitories for the gals. Somebody heaved a rock, conked him on the forehead. That changed things because the majority of the students sided with Culp, and after that things became calm.

"Dr. Culp had to follow the directions of the State Board. And they were having the same problems in Memphis and at the other state universities, and they were having still more trouble down at the University of Tennessee. It was the anti-war and the students' rights movement."

Culp, a native of Alabama, was the first president who came from outside of Tennessee. His successors, Art DeRosier and Ronald E. Beller, the current president, also came from out of state. Since the 1960's the college has grown to a university with graduate programs and nearly 10,000 students who come from all over the country. Still, the school maintains a clear identity with its mountain environment — as evidenced by the existence and growth of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services as a Center for Excellence.

Professor Williams will not admit a preference for any of the presidents. "I liked them all, and I have a much greater respect for presidents than I did before I started. The thing that has impressed me about them, all of them had more than the normal amounts of energy and they worked 26 hours a day on the job, always."

The history of the university still lacks a title, though one Williams has proposed is *East Tennessee State University, Seventy-Five Years of Tradition and Vision — 1911 to 1986.* Publication was meant to coincide with the 75th anniversary celebration in October, but Williams does not believe it will be out by then. He also doesn't seem perturbed by that fact. Maybe because this volume will be his second book, he feels he can afford to be patient. His first book was part of the University of Tennessee's Three Star Series for young readers. *Tennessee Presidents* was an account of the three U.S. presidents who came from the state (Jackson, Polk and Johnson). Williams wrote it just after he retired.

While he was researching ETSU's history, the staff at the university's archives let him bring papers to his office where he could smoke, listen to the radio and look out the window, an activity he likes, especially in the spring. "I write very slowly. Some days I write three or four pages, and some days I don't do that. I just sit, daydream."

Now, while he waits for red-penciled copies of his latest manuscript to come back from various readers, Williams writes speeches for groups and talks to visitors about his work. "It's been damned interesting, going through those papers and getting a feel for this school. It was just emerging when I came in 1949, and I got to learn what happened the 30 years before and then I've seen the rest of it. The gave me this office and let me hang out here. And they gave me a little something, but I would have done it for nothing."

Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia

Delle Dulaney Smith.

Coming Home to Appalachia

Bettie Sellers

My Grandmother Cosby was a storyteller. It was from her that I, growing up on a farm in middle Georgia, first became acquainted with the Appalachian hills of northern Georgia. Great-grandfather Seale had followed his Methodist calling through the hills and valleys of Nacoochee and Brasstown, serving at times as many as fifteen churches. And it was his denomination that had established the little mission school which would become Young Harris College where Grandmother came as student in 1889, I as teacher of English in 1965. It was a strange feeling to come home to Appalachia, a homecoming to a place where I had never been but somehow knew like the back of my hand. And that homecoming was the birth of my career as writer — for only here did I know that I was a poet.

Three Women of Brasstown

Bettie Sellers

I. Pink

Her mama called her "Pink" when she was born,
to match a tiny flower pressed in Exodus—
from Charlestown gardens, its like not found
among the blossoms wild in Brasstown soil.

She called the two boys "Flotsam" and "Jetsam,"
having heard such words ring somewhere
with all the strength of heroes: Samson, Saul—
though never could she find them in The Book

no matter if she searched to Revelation's end.
The last child Mama named "Rebecca" to be sure,
make up for giving wrong names to the boys—
and those now stuck too tight to budge.

Then Mama died, not knowing just how right
she'd called her boys, hell-bent to leave the plow
and hoe for parts out West where gold grew common
as the stones they cursed in winding valley rows.

In time, their faces faded as Pink brushed
Rebecca's long red hair, the color of her own.
She washed and cooked, up on a wooden stool
that Papa made so she could reach the tubs and stove.

She stitched the gown for Rebecca's wedding day,
embroidered it with pinks and ragged robins
round the neck and sleeves. In other springs,
she knitted caps for babies never hers.

She did for Papa till his days were through
and kept the cabin neat as Mama ever could.
Alone, she withered slowly, frail and dry
as petals caught and pressed by Exodus.

II. Mornings, Sheba Combs Her Hair

She watches from the open door, the man
long-legged, tall and straight, his hair a flame
like foxes make as they run through the broom
sedge patch behind her house. This neighbor
passes by each day to climb the slope
of Cedar Ridge, cut logs to build a barn
near where the trail that crosses Unicoi
turns west through Brasstown Gap.

She watches, thinking how her own man,
gone these three years, never had
that loose-limbed stride, that fire atop
his head. Older than she, he never made
her heart run wild and fly across the valley
free as red-tailed hawks rise high
on currents of cold morning air. She watches,
planning how one day she'll walk out, ask him
how his wife does, how his son. She'll wait
beside the big oak, ask him in to warm his hands
before her hearth, to notice how her dark hair falls
as smooth as water in Corn Creek caresses stones.
How she will warm cold fingers in his hair,
and face eternal burning if she must

III. And All The Princes Are Gone

She sits beside the oak fire, Lilah, pale,
intent on nothing here where mountains circle
Brasstown tight as walls around a medieval
castle formed. She holds the book, its cover
gone, its pages tissue thin with fingering.
She peers through smoke to where the men,
their coats brocaded, satin tight around
their thighs, bow to ladies in a banquet
hall. Soft music sounds around the spitting
of the logs that Samuel dragged from Double
Knob behind his lumbering ox, a mild and
placid beast who chews his hay as though
in contemplation of the history of his kind.
She sees the ox, a Yule log chained behind,
crossing the drawbridge to a castle court,
and servants hanging holly boughs to grace
stone walls, and torches shadowing a feast.
Her cabin is not here, nor Samuel's supper
simmering on the hook above the fire. Dark
comes, and Lilah watches dancing figures spin,
a pleasant dream to warm this wilderness where
life is hard, and all the princes are gone.

These poems will be included in *Liza's Monday and Other Poems*, forthcoming from Appalachian Consortium Press.

Jenny Says

Barbara Smith

a visit to the grave of Jenny Wiley in River, Kentucky

Now, hush! You know better.
You ain't listened for over a year,
And you're kinda wearin' me thin.

Now, sit, child. Anywhere. It don't matter.
The feelin's gone after all this time.
So sit. In fact, honey,
Kick off them shoes,
And before you settle, come close,
Real close. I promise I won't pinch.

That's right. Touch the stone.
Put your whole hand on it. Let it be warm.
That's me, child, holding you tight.

No, it don't matter, the years.
You know. You know.
Now sit. Listen.
It ain't no time to hurry off,
A once-a-year visit?—that 's hardly enough.

Sure, I been o.k. Winters here ain't harsh,
And the fencing still is whole.
So far nobody's bothered me.
Worst thing, the scatterin' of the younguns,
Them of our loins, both young and old,
Me n' Thomas both past forty when the second crop begun,
But the good Lord knowed we needed them,
And he kept me fresh 'til they had all come,
One for each one lost before.

No, of course it weren't the same,
Me bein' so much older. And Thomas.
But they was a comfort none the less.
Now they're scattered or dug up,
The ten who never knowed each other
Until they all was in the grave,
Some off in Ohio, Indiana, and west,
Some buried right here in the yard
Where I can keep an eye, stones dug up or not.

But it's o.k., I keep tellin you.
I listen to the wind and them little birds—
The ones with the white-tipped wings?—
And watch the pokeberries stain the sky
And the stones they fall upon.
It's o.k., a few folks stoppin' to tell me names,
A few to pay some heed to mine.

Now, don't you let them move me, hear?,
To brassy signs and banjo tunes
Just leave me be. This place is mine,
Here where I spin and churn and weave
The tales and all the memories
Into a blanket to keep you warm.

It's o.k. I'll be waitin' for you
Next year and the next year
As long as you'll come.
Stop your frettin'.
There'll always be room enough for you
Here, right here, next to Jenny.

Anndrena Belcher's Journey Home

Anndrena Belcher

Anndrena Belcher grew up in Chicago, but there was another home, what to her was her real home, pulling at her, making her homesick. That tug from Eastern Kentucky has brought her back to the mountains where she was born and where she has now lived and worked for ten years celebrating mountain heritage and culture.

For Old Time Sake is her business, a one-woman storytelling factory in Gate City, Virginia. Belcher travels all over the region, sharing tales and songs and dances with students, teachers and just about anybody else who wants to hear a good story.

In 1985 Belcher became a fellow of ETSU's Center for Appalachian Studies and Services. The fellowship allowed her to bring her stories to schools in East Tennessee. Some schools were so small that they never would have been able to have such a visitor without the financial aid provided by the fellowship.

Possessing a master's degree in social studies with a concentration in Appalachian Studies from Northeastern Illinois University, Belcher can add the perspective of a trained oral historian to her programs.

The story of Anndrena Belcher's returning to her roots in the mountains has become part of *Long Journey Home*, a film being produced at Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Since it was established in 1969, Appalshop Films has produced the nation's largest and most varied collection of documentary films about Appalachia. Appalshop has grown into a regional media center, expanding to include music recording, regional theater, a photography workshop and "Headwaters," a series broadcast over public television in Kentucky.

Besides protraying Anndrena Belcher's story, *Long Journey Home* shows stories of the first residents of Appalachia, the Cherokee Indians, and of some of the black residents of the mountains.

Because Anndrena Belcher's story in *Long Journey Home* is especially fitting for our homecoming theme, we wanted to have it in this special issue. Elizabeth Barret has given us permission to print an excerpt of the working script (the film is a works in/progress). The words have been transcribed from filmed interviews with Anndrena Belcher.

Script
Long Journey Home

The making of *Long Journey Home* with Anndrena Belcher (left) in Chicago. Andy Garrison is filming, Elizabeth Barret is handling sound. Photo by Maxine Kenny.

"Long Journey Home," a film about the migrations of people to and from the Appalachian region, is also about the diversity of the people who live in the region. The film's narrative is drawn from actual taped interviews. These interviews tell a universal story of migration: the expectation of most migrants that they would stay only temporarily; their homesickness and attachments to the culture of the homeplace; and their slow acceptance or rejection of the new place. The film shows the way in which different groups relate to the mountains as "home," and also shows that even those who moved away with no hope of returning developed deep roots in the region. As a result of their urban experiences, migrants from the area often developed a greater sense of being Appalachian.

Appalshop History Film Project

Project Director: Helen M. Lewis

Scriptwriters: Maxine Kenny, Elizabeth Barret

Film Director: Elizabeth Barret

The film opens with the images and sounds of Interstate 75, the main north-south highway cutting through the Appalachian region. The three lanes of traffic moving south are packed. You get a sense of many people in transit. There is a quick succession of license plates identifying Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois. At a truck stop we hear distinctive accents of West Virginia and east Kentucky telling us they are "going home" for the 4th of July weekend. One man is black and relates how he is "laid off from Ford Motor Company." Another, a white man, is out-of-work also and is moving his family back to live with relatives in the mountains.

The film cuts to a young woman driving through a coal town in eastern Kentucky. On the outskirts of town she turns up a "holler" where the modest frame homes and gardens take up most of the bottom land between the road and the steep hillsides. It's early morning.

Anndrena Belcher talks as she drives.

When we first moved to Chicago we'd come home every holiday and lots of weekends. My dad'd work the second shift, so he'd get off Friday night, and we would load up in the car and get a roll of bologna and a bag of light bread and drive all night and get home in the morning. You'd just see smoke coming out of the chimneys, and you would be home in time for breakfast.

My parents and little sister still live up there. They work there. But I can remember every spring my father would get homesick for the mountains — homesick for hunting and fishing — and mostly go off on these big drunks and come down to the mountains and do all this crazy stuff. I looked at it like a pilgrimage. Like you go and you know you can't be there.

I don't think they went to Chicago thinking they were going to stay. They pretty much had always thought they would go and make some money and get on their feet and then come back home and live here forever. I remember Daddy saying year after year after year, "Come next spring, we're going to go to the mountains." And I believed it. Each year I'd think, "Well, next year we'll go." Then finally I was about 12, and I said, "Daddy, I don't think we're going to go home." And I think that was the point in my life that I decided that if I was going to come back to the mountains to live, I'd probably have to do it on my own.

Fiddle music comes up and film cuts to Anndrena climbing a long, steep trail to a small deserted house at the head of a holler. This was her grandmother's house where she stayed as a child. She points above the house to a cemetery on the side of a hill where her ancestors are buried.

See closeups of tombstones with early dates of birth, different family member names.

Shots of entire hilltop graveyard with mountains in the distance.

My people came in here from Virginia, through Pound Gap, as far as I can tell. We're Scotch-Irish. According to what I can find out, we left Ireland in the late 1700's, early 1800's to seek a better place to live; a place where we could grow enough food to where they wouldn't constantly be facing famine.

I think most people look at the Irish who moved over as coming either during the potato famine or during the Irish Rebellion. Many Irish people moved out long before that because they were looking for a better place to live. My ancestors thought that they had found that place when they reached Pike County...the beauty of the area. It was able to provide for a very large family.

A homestead had some flatland where you could grow a garden; you could raise pigs and you always had milk cows which provided milk and butter for the table. I think that was a way of life that many people dreamed of and when they found it, I think they wanted to protect and defend themselves to make sure that they kept it.

Anndrena Belcher voice over

Footage from the film, "The Newcomers" showing deserted coal area houses, whole towns vacated.

My daddy's brother had gone up to Chicago and got a job, and my mother and father would talk about different relatives who were there. This was in 1958. I was really young, about seven, and they left me and my sister with our grandparents over on Laurel Branch, and they went up there and got jobs and worked for a month or so and got settled in. We thought they'd never come back. I remember going out on the front porch at night and crying and my grandmaw saying, "What're you crying for?" and me saying, "I want my mother and father." And her saying, "But they can't hear you." And me just crying louder. "If I cry loud enough, they'll hear."

Sync

Re-enacted film footage with home movie feel to it.

Well, they came to get us, and we headed to Chicago. Driving into the city I remember feeling that everything was going to fall. There were all these street lights, and they made little bead designs, and we went over all these highways that were built up, and I remember feeling not sure of it. It was real strange and didn't feel solid. I kept thinking, "They're driving over this. Is this going to fall?"

Then we got to this real little bitty, well, it was about a two-and-a-half room apartment. I looked out the kitchen window into a brick wall and an alley, and I thought, "Well, I guess this is the way it's supposed to be."

1960s film of Uptown community in Chicago describing who was migrating to the cities, about some companies sending buses down to the mountains to recruit people for their factories.

Anndrena's voice over migration murals on the high school walls she attended.

I remember when my friend, she was my best friend, and her parents got ready to move back. Their car was all packed full, and she was sitting in this little bitty space and me saying goodbye to her. It was just real hard. Her mother was sitting there saying, "Well, get in the car and go with us." And I remember thinking, "I wish I could, but I can't. My family is here."

In the city it was like we were invisible. People just didn't see you as belonging there. And then people down home looked at you like you was a city slicker. So you really didn't fit anywhere anymore — yet, you fit both places.

The camera cuts to a long shot of the mountains and we hear the strains of a fiddle playing a dance tune and as the camera moves in closer we see a music and dance festival in progress. Anndrena is dancing and calling formations in a circle dance. The dance ends and Anndrena comes toward the camera.

I guess I've been dancing just about all my life. It was one way that I could keep in touch with who I was — being from the mountains. I came back here when I was 25 and I've been teaching dance ever since. It seems kind of funny now — me teaching dances to people who have lived here all their lives.

I guess I always felt my home was in Kentucky. Most of my family was here. I mean the old people, my granny and pa and my mamaw and grandaddy. They had always helped take care of us and that holler was where I thought of as home. Even though we went off, we'd come back. I think a lot of migrants feel real strongly

about being mountain people.

Voice-over

There's a difference in the mountains I've come back to from the mountains I left and the mountains I dreamed about while I was away. Even when I was in Chicago, I'd come home every Christmas; I'd take the Greyhound bus down and visit my grandmother, and every year I could see it changing. I'd feel scared about it. It was taking away my dream. I'd see a lot of strip mining and feel real upset about it, but it was hard to do anything from Chicago. But a lot of migrants in my neighborhood were feeling strong about their identities as mountain people, urban hillbillies, and wanting to be involved in these issues.

Sync

When I came back to the mountains, I went back to Pike County, but I only lived there a month or so before I wound up moving on over here into Virginia. And I think it would be real hard for me to go to Pike County and live. It was real interesting because I saw what made my father and mother hurt and I saw what made them mad. And it makes me mad.

One of the things I realized in the city is that people who organize together can make changes, can come by some power to have control over their community or over their neighborhood or over their country. Largely what I felt when I was in Pike County was a lot of powerlessness and "No, you can't do anything about it" and "It's been that way forever." I remember calling up a friend and talking to her and her mother and still loving them but feeling, "Oh, my. We're so different now." They were calm, easy-going and accepting — real bright people but really afraid.

Contemporary scenes of Pike County including housing, fast food chains, banking developments, highway construction, etc.

There's a lot of wealth in Pike County. I mean, when we left it was little ol' wood houses just like we lived in and you come back and you see all these brick houses with white columns up and down, and the kids driving fancy cars to school. That poor old mountain stuff for them is a thing of the past, and they don't want to look back and they don't want to go back.

But I was seeing things differently, Being in the city turned out to be a positive experience for me. I began to search out how my situation and today's situation relates to my history.

Anndrena at Dance Workshop: Giving instructions, music begins, dancing starts and continues. She comes toward the camera

I feel really lucky to be doing what I'm doing now...and earning my money, making a living doing things I love. I love to dance and I've loved to dance since I was a little thing. Today, this is a workshop in Appalachian Studies and the people here are teachers in east Tennessee. I also work with people in Virginia, in Kentucky, North Carolina, just where there are people interested in old-time dance and music and stories. The idea here is to see how they can take the dances they learn and the stories they learn, the songs they learn...take them back to the classroom and integrate those into the regular curriculum. I guess what I see as real, real important about that is bringing the community and the educational system together and integrating. It's really having the educational system say, "There is a diverse lot of people and information here and it's valid." We no longer hear people saying, "Come to school and forget that you're a mountain person, change the way you talk, and change all those old ways, drop your values," instead, at least some folks in the schools are saying, "That's wonderful, that's positive, and you can enrich the educational system with these things."

Information about Long Journey Home *can be had by contacting Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky (606-633-0108). To contact Anndrena Belcher write Route 2, Box 275, Gate City, Virginia 24251 or call 703-479-2762.*

A Weaving of Art and Community

Pat Arnow

One tapestry celebrates the history and the music of the Bethel Christian Church in Jonesborough. For over a hundred years, this church has served as the social and spiritual center of the black community in Tennessee's oldest town.

Another tapestry pays tribute to an East Tennessee tradition, the Sulphur Springs Camp Meeting. This week-long religious celebration has been held every summer since 1820 in the picturesque village of Sulphur Springs.

The third tapestry is a reproduction in silk of a topographical map of Bumpass Cove, the site of a toxic waste dump that was closed in 1979 by angry, worried citizens.

These wall hangings were made for the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University in honor of Tennessee Homecoming '86. They represent some important aspects of life both past and present in East Tennessee. They also show off the talent and versatility of their creator, Margaret Gregg.

One of Margaret Gregg's Homecoming tapestries.

She's one of those rare individuals who makes her living through art, selling colorful silk-screen prints, handmade clothing, and fabric constructions on which she appliqués, hand paints, quilts and pieces. All of these techniques went into the Homecoming wall hangings. Gregg also learned photo silk screening just for this project. With this process she could print old photos and newspaper clippings right onto the tapestries.

It was by talking to longtime residents of each of the communities and by borrowing and copying old photos that she developed the ideas that became the elaborate Homecoming '86 tributes.

Working with communities is not new to Gregg. She's always been both artist and activist, weaving her art and conscience together into a unique style of living and working.

A short autobiographical film made in 1980 explains the spiritual and artistic development that have made Margaret Gregg into a vital force in her community. "Re-Member" is a montage of animated segments and photos. In quick succession, it shows Gregg as a child in Chicago, becoming a Catholic nun, questioning her role as a Glenmary sister, and finally, joining a group that is leaving the order to work in East Tennessee. The film is honest and earnest, just as Gregg herself is. She's a woman willing to explore and reveal, curious about both the inner life and the people around her.

Even as a member of a community of Catholic Sisters, Gregg made art an important part of her life. It was her major at the College of Mount Saint Joseph in Cincinnati and at the Cambridge-Goddard Graduate School for Social Change in Vermont she studied theology and art. After she left the religious order in 1967 and moved to Knoxville she continued studying art at Penland and Arrowmont.

After living in East Tennessee for 19 years, her voice, with its flat as the prairie A's and hard G's, still gives away Midwestern origins. But it is clear that she has embraced her adopted home wholeheartedly.

Each theme of the tapestries in the Homecoming project Gregg chose in a personal way. "It was specific groups that I had the strongest feelings about." The one closest to home for her was the black community in Jonesborough. "There's not much recognition given specifically to the black community, and there's an incredible history there. It's just plain ignored." She found that the Bethel Christian Church, Jonesborough's largest black congregation, was the center of the black community, and she decided to focus her creative energy on developing art which captured an image of that long-established institution.

Her personal history with the church inspired her, too. When she first moved to Jonesborough, members of the congregation invited her to services. Though she was generally the only white person there, she was made to feel welcome and she especially enjoyed the singing. The choir, which has been invited to perform all over the area, became the main theme of the tapestry. "I thought about what's distinctive, I thought about the music. The music carries into so many other aspects of people's lives. It's powerful."

After she finished the raw silk six-by-nine-foot wall hanging, she took it over to the church before an evening meeting. While she held it up, members of the congregation examined it, recognizing faces in the photo silk screened images and impressed with how the sketches Gregg had drawn of the choir months before had become appliquéd images. The group immediately arranged to display the tribute at their 119th anniversary celebration in October.

The Sulphur Springs Camp Meeting dates back even farther than the beginning of the Bethel Church, to 1820. "I had never heard of a camp meeting. I learned a lot about this as I got into it. It's a quaint thing. In the early times — 1700's, 1800's — it was like Christmas and the Fourth of July. It's what they used to do before they had revivals. Once a year they'd get together and the preachers would come and it was a big knock-down--drag-out good time." In those days, the camp meeting lasted a week and families from all over would actually camp out and gather in the big open structure to pray and sing.

Now the meeting is held for four or five evenings in August and is more like a revival. The original structure still stands in the little community of Sulphur Springs and it is still used for the camp meeting every summer. "They call it 'the shed.' It has a big roof and all these beams with a ceiling. Some of the beams go back to the 1800's. They've had to put a new roof on and they had to reinforce some of the beams, but it's still essentially the same."

The shed also provided the framework for Gregg's tapestry, with strips of material outlining the shape of the structure. With the kind of colorful fabric often used in quilts, this piece had the most traditional feel of the three hangings. But Gregg points out that unlike traditional quilts, "It doesn't have any repeating

pattern at all."

When Gregg finished the hanging, she arranged to show it to the Home Demonstration Club that had helped collect photos and history for the project. One member of the club, Jo Ellen Hale, had done all of the hand quilting on the piece. As the members gathered in the basement of the Methodist Church they were enthusiastic. One woman recognized herself in one of the photo silk screened pictures. Another recognized her grandfather. The group agreed they wanted to hang the piece during their next camp meeting. As Gregg was leaving, Gladys Lady, a life-long Sulphur Springs resident, told how her grandfather Keyes used to run the camp meeting. She gave Gregg a weathered board that had been part of an old bench from the camp meeting shed.

The Bumpass Cove tapestry represents environmental concerns and activism. This small community on the banks of the Nolichuckey River would have remained peaceful, had not their lives been threatened by a chemical landfill. A scrapbook compiled by Roxie Wilson of Bumpass Cove tells the story. The book is filled with clippings from local papers: July 26, 1979, in the *Jonesborough Herald and Tribune*: "Concerned and angry citizens in the Bumpass Cove area have decided to take the situation into their own hands to prevent dumping of 'hazardous' waste products in the Bumpass Cove Sanitary Landfill which is located in their community. The citizens have tried to deal with the problem by talking with State and Health officials for the past three years about the dumping... last Saturday morning traces of flammable 'hazardous' chemicals were found in the river due to heavy flooding. Several people were removed from their homes and churches had to close down at the upper end of the cove because they could be in danger from chemical contamination. The residents reported that several barrels were seen floating down the Nolichuckey River. The Jonesboro water treatment plant was shut down..."

It wasn't long before a group of angry residents was blocking the road to the landfill site, not allowing trucks to go through to dump more chemicals. By the end of 1979, after operating for seven years, the dumpsite was finally closed. The battle was not completely won, however, since the landfill was never cleaned up.

When Gregg returned the scrapbook of clippings to Roxie Wilson, she brought along a present, a scarf on which she had silk screened a small section of the topographical map of Bumpass Cove. Before she put it around her neck, Wilson wanted to make sure that the dumpsite wasn't represented on that section of the map.

On the wallhanging, Gregg has hand-painted the map in delicate colors and sewn along the topographical lines. Over this lovely pattern on the tapestry she has stitched in red the dumpsite and the route the chemicals had escaped.

The Homecoming '86 wallhangings took Gregg four months to design and complete, but they weren't her only recent projects. In 1985, she was Tennessee coordinator of the Peace Ribbon; marchers wrapped this 15-mile-long ribbon of handmade tapestries around the Pentagon and onto the Capitol. Her colorful silk screen prints and handmade clothing have beeen displayed in Jonesborough at the Blue Iris Tea Room and Gallery and at the Jonesborough Designer Craftsman. She contributed the profits from her peace notecards to Peace Links. She thinks about her years of work in the peace movement. "It's important to think about what's coming next, to take care of things so there is a coming next."

Pat Arnow

Margaret Gregg works on Homecoming '86 tapestry. Completed Bethel Christian Church tribute is hanging on the wall.

In the fall of 1985 Gregg suspended all of her community and artistic activities to take advantage of an opportunity to study for six months at the Banff Fine Arts Center in Alberta, Canada. It was a much-needed change, both artistically and personally. She wanted to think about where she fit in the community as an artist. "Consumerism — you know, Yuppie stuff — influences so many people who want to survive as artists — because if you don't do things a certain way, you don't get money. To deal with an artistic philosophical direction, how to do that and how to deal with your integrity, motivation and direction is a real challenge.

"I want to become more myself. I learn a lot about that by being involved with other people and other things. Sometimes I chastise myself because I'm not dealing with the big serious complicated things and I trip off on my own little thing.

"But I subscribe to art for my own sake, which is different than art for art's sake. It's therapeutic. It keeps me together and it gives me a way to reach out. It provokes me to deal with the world around me. And it's a celebration."

Gregg's tapestries that celebrate Tennessee's Homecoming '86 will be on display around the area throughout the year. And Margaret Gregg, after returning to Jonesborough from Banff in April of 1986, is setting up a new studio in downtown Johnson City, where she will keep on celebrating life through her art.

REVIEW

Greater Johnson City: A Pictorial History

Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia

View of West Market Street in Johnson City in the early 1920's. One of the hundreds of illustrations in Ray Stahl's history book.

by Ray Stahl

The Donning Company Publishers, Norfolk and Virginia Beach, 1986. (228 Pages, photographs, maps, bibliography. Paperback, $15.50.)

Richard Blaustein

Tennessee Homecoming '86, our statewide celebration of community history and traditions, is in full swing; all across this state, members of local Heritage Committees are seeking to recover bits and pieces of the past, delving into courthouse records, church histories, family collections of photographs and heirlooms and the memories of older citizens. From all that this reviewer has been able to observe, this impulse to reflect upon the past of communities in Tennessee is largely genuine; and along with the predictable outpouring of Homecoming '86 mugs, bumper stickers and baseball caps, many worthwhile local history projects and community celebrations are also taking shape. It may well be local pride on my part, but I find it hard to imagine that very many Tennessee communities will be able to point to a Homecoming '86 project as substantial and impressive as Ray Stahl's *Greater Johnson City: A Pictorial History.*

Ray Stahl, a former director of public relations at East Tennessee State University, has gathered an extraordinarily rich and diverse collection of photographs, some dating back as early as the 1850's , and has written an accurate, lucid text to accompany them. Stahl takes us from the time of the Cherokees and the arrival of Daniel Boone and the Watauga settlers through the era of railroad-building and industrialization up to the present period of urban expansion and high technology. Along the way, we are treated to portraits of civic, religious and commercial leaders, and scenes of ordinary people at work and play, along with depictions of area homes, schools, churches, stores and factories. Natives of the upper East Tennessee area may simply enjoy this book for its nostalgic value, but there is plenty here to engage the interest of scholars coming from a variety of fields. Students of folk and historic architecture will find excellent examples of house and building styles dating back to the late eighteenth century. Railroad buffs will appreciate the shots of vintage equipment, construction sites and depots, including the handsome full-color front cover illustration by Johnson City artist, Ted Laws. Students of urban and industrial development will be particularly interested in the information Stahl provides concerning the careers of pioneer industrialists such as Colonel Thomas E. Matson, who built the narrow gauge East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad to link the iron mines of Cranberry, North Carolina with the furnaces and foundries of Johnson City, and George L. Carter, who brought the Clinchfield Railroad into this area and donated the land upon which East Tennessee State University now stands.

As it happens, 1986 is also the 75th anniversary of East Tennessee State University, which opened in 1911 as the East Tennessee State Normal School, and Stahl includes several fine examples of early snapshots and landscapes from the university history section of ETSU's Archives of Appalachia. Along with this rich record of the past, we are shown evidence of Johnson City's contemporary growth, including pictures of new hospitals, sports facilities and airport terminals. Piedmont Airlines recently devoted a substantial section of its in-house magazine, *Pace*, to the Johnson City-Bristol-Kingsport area, and this pictorial history by Ray Stahl should be essential follow-up reading for newcomers interested in learning more about this complex and rapidly changing area. All in all, Ray Stahl has produced a carefully researched and highly satisfying graphic history of one of Southern Appalachia's major urban centers which should be of interest to history buffs and professional scholars alike long after 1986. Strongly recommended.

Finding Poetry

Rita Quillen

When I began work on my thesis on Appalachian poets Fred Chappell, Danny Marion, Jim Wayne Miller, and Robert Morgan nearly four years ago, I made a surprising discovery. The region was alive with creative energy: everwhere you looked there were small presses and periodicals turning out page after page of prose and poetry, reviews and criticisms. Readings, workshops, and writing contests were being scheduled all around the region. But I found out that there was no comprehensive listing anywhere of that literary output, no resource that a teacher, student, or researcher could use to track down a particular writer or publication.

Jim Wayne Miller was the first one to the rescue with his *I Have A Place*, a small paperback bibliography of Appalachian books, articles and publishers. Starting with his listings on Appalachian poetry, I began to expand the list with the aid of Dr. Jerry Williamson, "industrial-strength editor" of the *Appalachian Journal*, his staff, and librarians at Berea College, UK, ETSU, Mountain Empire Community College, and others.

The resulting bibliography of Contemporary Appalachian Poetry was published in the Fall, 1985, issue of *AJ*. A back copy can be obtained by writing to the journal at University Hall, ASU, Boone, N.C. 28608. My hope is that this bibliography and my thesis, *Looking For Native Ground*, to be published by the Appalachian Consortium Press, will join with other critical and scholarly works, forming the foundation for a burgeoning field of study. I feel very strongly that Appalachian literature will gain respect, recognition, and readership as our self-confidence and ambitions grow, and allowing us to produce a body of criticism worthy of the name.

REVIEWS

Appalachian Writers

A taped program (1 hour) from National Public Radio, available from NPR Customer Service, 975 Observatory Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53106 for $16.95.

Fred Waage

This tape, originally produced in 1980 in the "Options" series, consists of interviews with, and readings by, James Still, Verna Mae Slone, and Gurney Norman. James Still is presented as the "veteran" Appalachian writer, and Slone and Norman as the "new" generation — Slone ironically, because although she is new as a writer, she's not much younger than Still.

At the outset, Cratis Williams is quoted to the effect that James Still is the surviving representative of the first generation of Appalachian writers to write for Appalachians themselves, not for outsiders, and therefore of the first generation to avoid degrading and stereotyping them through caricature. Still's wry and often evasive comments on his career reinforce the impression of his indifference to, if not contempt for, the non-Appalachian literary world.

Most of Slone's contribution is an evocation of traditional Appalachian customs and rituals, presented in a folkloric atmosphere; although winning, these reminiscences and texts did not present, for this listener, any particular insight into the roles and practices of the Appalachian writer. In his interview, Norman is led to discuss his flight from Appalachia to California, his involvement with alternative lifestyles and Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth* catalogues, in the last of which his classic fiction "Divine Right's Trip" first appeared, and the significance of his return to his homeland. Norman also reads his short story, "Night Ride," which dramatizes the culturally conditioned cultural dislocation of the contemporary young Appalachian male. Norman's travels provide a telling contrast to Still's refusal to travel, but, although one should not ask too much of a one-hour program, I feel *Appalachian Writers* does not provide, or even refer to, the diversity and richness of its subject, and thus provides to a national audience a somewhat inaccurately anemic view of Appalachian writing today.

Photo by Jamey Campbell

Nostalgia For 70

by Jim Wayne Miller

Seven Buffaloes Press, Box 249, Big Timber, Montana 59011. 60 pages. $6.75.

If there was ever any doubt, Jim Wayne Miller's latest collection of poetry, *Nostalgia For 70*, makes clear that the region's best poet is not a "regional" writer. Even when we encounter predictable Appalachian scenes and characters here such as the "Wart-faced Clayton Rogers" in "Quick Trip Home," we see a mountain landscape and the mind that has shaped it being disrupted and intruded upon by "a huge white dish high on a ridge" and we hear the strident strains of punk rock.

The poet of *Nostalgia* is a man on the move, either hustling in response to the demands of his vocation, as in "Giving At The Office" or the nearly surrealistic "An Ordinary Evening Bowling Green," or escaping in dream from telephones, committee meetings and correspondence. Sometimes even the attempted escape is thwarted by the intrusion of the workaday world as in "Suburban Pioneer" where a camper drives into the dark woods where "The stream goes quiet, listening," but

> Down among the treeroots
> black, shiny as obsidian
> a telephone
> begins to ring.

The "70" for which the poet nostalgically yearns in the title poem is the figurative speed at which his life was lived in less hectic, more contemplative times when

> we knew we were traveling
> steadily south, the weather was growing pleasanter,
> and we were entering a season of orange groves.
> Every day for many days, perhaps for years,
> ocean would lie on the horizon, a destination.

As these lines suggest, motion is indeed one of the central impulses in this volume and the irony in the poet's citing 70 as a moderate speed not only underscores the frenetic pace of his current life, it also highlights Miller's increasing reliance on the ironic mode throughout this collection.

The alter ego who emerges from these poems is the beleaguered artist the region has taken as its own as well as the academic who can distance himself from himself and see the absurdity of his situation.

This "intellectual" element is further enhanced by several "literary" poems in the volume. "Lydia and Stan," a parody of "Leda and the Swan" is the most notable of these, although there are also allusions to Li Po and a nod at Baudelaire in "Correspondence."

Nostalgia For 70 is delightful because of its yoking of the academic and mountain worlds, because of the poet's fine sense of humor overlying his basic seriousness. But mostly the book succeeds because of the striking individual poems one "discovers" even in re-reading. My favorites are "Cheerleader," which has been in print a long time but has until now been uncollected, "Growing Wild," a lycanthropic fantasy, and the aforementioned "Lydia and Stan." But these choices have emerged from my most recent reading. The next time through I am sure to pick out others that speak to a particular mood I am in or reveal something I had failed to pick up in an earlier reading. These poems have that effect. They demand close and repeated examination.

Photo by Alice Anthony

Mary Ruth Livingston of Johnson City. She's the mother of Nathan Livingston who is featured on the cover of this issue.

Come Home

Garry Barker

Lengthening shadows
And a slow, sweated mule
Ruffled hens cluck to roost
In the soft summer dusk
Sleeping hounds curl beneath the cool porch floor
Lamplight flickers from the kitchen window
Cold fresh milk and a warm cornpone—
Weary bones rest
At the end of day.

Fox and copperhead stir, eager
To hunt by the August moon
Night winds tease the ridgetops
And brush gently, quietly,
Softly down the sleeping valley.

Ancient mountains
Weathered by centuries
The dark and bloody land
Which forever binds us
To a deep and unshakeable heritage
To a deeprooted faith
Which calls us always
To come home,
Come home.

A Family Tradition

Gretchen McCroskey

In the Food Country Supermarket
David stacks cans of green beans and corn and tomatoes
tugging at his Andhurst necktie
which chokes up visions of long straight rows
of tasseled corn and half runner beans and German tomatoes.

His granddaddy points across the creek.
"That's where we had the cannery.
Maggie Phipps sat out there
under that oak tree and peeled tomatoes all day.
We'd haul the cans up on Pine Hill Mountain
and store them in Paul Rush's smokehouse.
Horses couldn't pull a whole load up that steep grade.
We'd label the cans and mark them with the year.
Next day we'd load the wagon and set out to Bristol.

That was work, boy.
You'd not complain
about wearing a necktie
if you'd known work like I've done."

"Son, would you tell me where to find
the Stokely green beans?"
David wakes from his dream,
barebacked and barefooted,
carrying a bushel of Kentucky Wonders
down to the creek for Maggie Phipps
to break and string.

"Yes, m'am, the Stokely green beans
are in aisle 5."

David straightens his tie
with prideful remembering.
A nod to aisle 5
or a wagon trip to Bristol.
What the heck?

This family ain't going to let anybody
go to bed hungry.

Another Generation

Gretchen McCroskey

Stooped from the toil of seventy harvests,
Clyde Monroe picks his way
Like a lame mare walking
Over rocky lanes.

He lifts his hand over his eyes
And scans the unkempt field,
Its tender grass choked out
By honeysuckle and locusts
Which knew only stunted growth
When his strong arms cradled the scythe.

He remembers the summer that field was newground,
How he worked from sunup to sundown
To wrench locust stumps,
How he plowed with two sorrel mules,
Then dragged the ground
To blue-black smoothness.

This land, tamed by his father and grandfather,
Runs wild as the deer that left their tracks
Down by the spring,
While his sons and grandsons
Go to city offices,
Feed numbers to computers,
And talk about retiring
On the farm.

photo by Carletta Sims

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Fall, 1986 -
CHEROKEES
Winter, 1987 -
APPALACHIAN CHILDHOOD

Pat Arnow

Alex Haley, author of *Roots* and Co-chairman of Tennessee Homecoming '86, at ETSU.

NOW AND THEN

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services/ Institute for Appalachian Affairs

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